The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

JULY 35c

OUR 200TH ISSUE!

PHILIP MacDONALD
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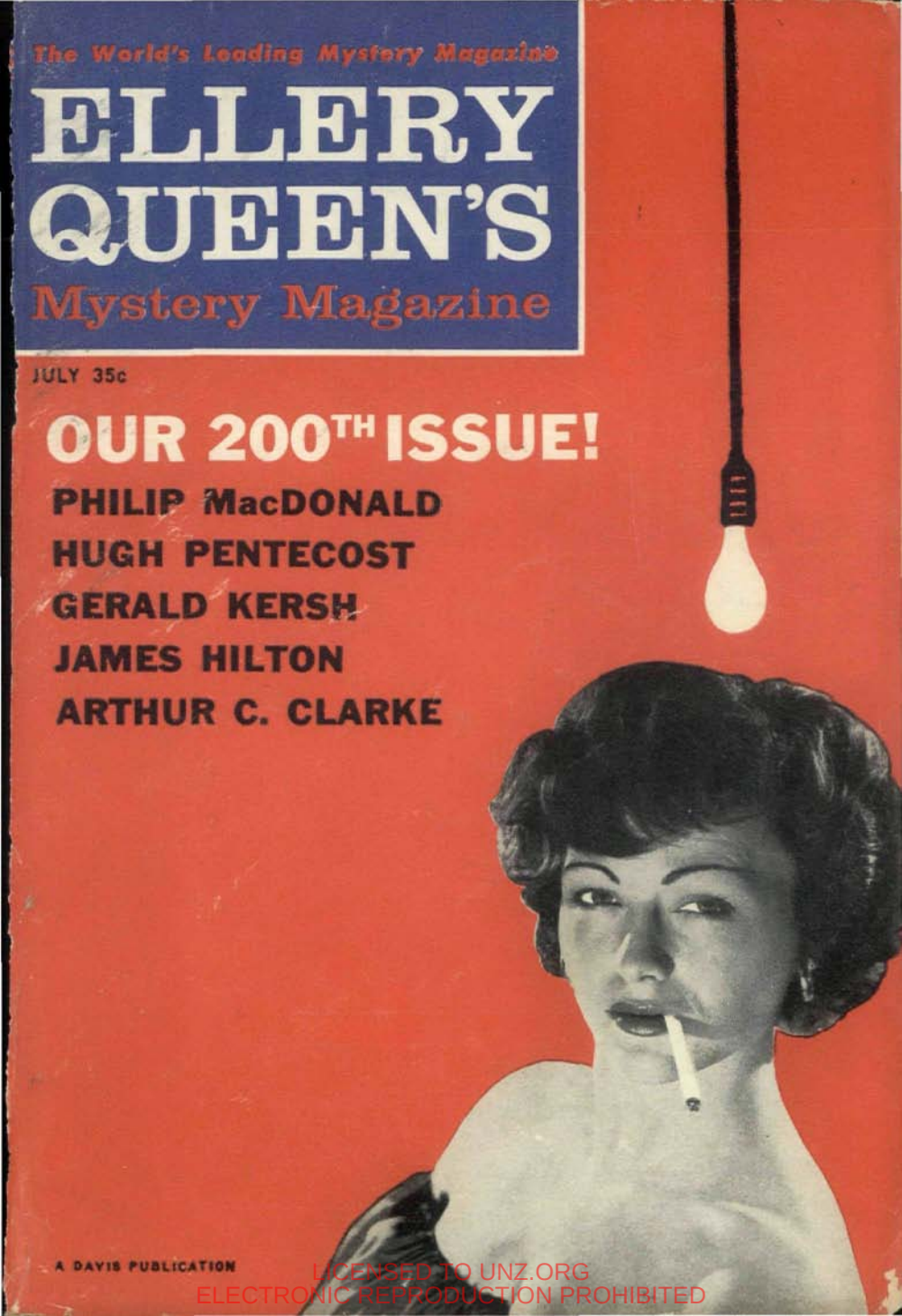

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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

including **BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

Printed in 7 editions — American, Australian, English, French, Italian, Japanese, & Portuguese

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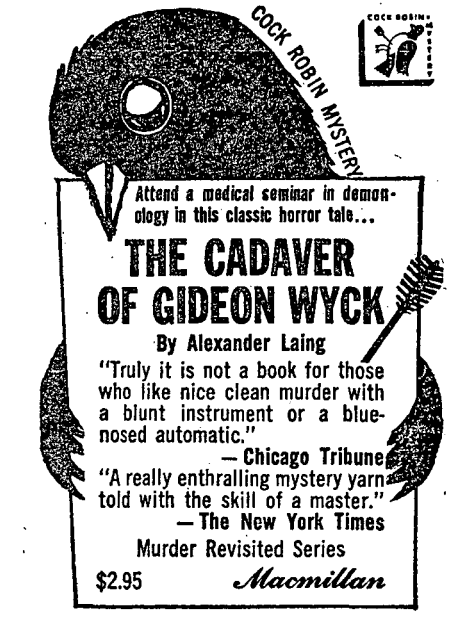

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a "Don't Miss" novelette by

PHILIP MACDONALD

In the Course of Justice

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: PHILIP MACDONALD

TITLE: *In the Course of Justice*

TYPE: Suspense Story

LOCALE: California

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Philip MacDonald has written some daring short stories for EQMM. Here he offers what might be considered a most controversial theme—and handles it with the tact and delicacy we have come to expect from one of the modern masters in the mystery field.*

NIKOLAS BETHLEN AND HIS WIFE arrived in the United States as part of the first plane load of post-revolution Hungarian refugees.

At any other time the newspapers would have made much more of their arrival, partly because of Anna Bethlen's past fame as an actress, but mainly because Bethlen was one of the world's foremost nuclear physicists. As things were, however, with the whole free world ablaze with pity and anger, it was the story of Everyman which took first place.

The newsmen marked Bethlen, of course, checking his name for detailed follow-up in the near future. They felt with reason that a scientist of Bethlen's caliber, and one moreover who was Washington-bound on Governmental invitation, should be easy to get hold of when wanted.

But they were wrong. Bethlen went to Washington, where he was received by all the expected figures. But after that—within the space of three days, to be exact—he disappeared.

There was no hint of skulduggery or subversion about the disappearance—nothing in the least sen-

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sational. It was merely that Officialdom, when questioned, just didn't happen to know where Doctor Bethlen happened to be. He had many friends in America, Officialdom confided; quite possibly he was staying with one of these, enjoying a well earned and peaceful rest.

In short, the people who knew wouldn't tell. And since there is nothing more irksome to the Press than bland uncommunicativeness, the whereabouts of Doctor Nikolas Bethlen became a challenge to every member of the Fourth Estate, so that for a month or six weeks every known or possible contact of his was beseiged by newsmen.

But to no avail—until, five weeks and one day after the Bethlens' arrival in the United States, Michael Hackett received a letter from his sister.

Mike was on the permanent staff of the *San Francisco Sun,* and had been since he was twenty-five and a promising Feature man. Which meant he'd been with the paper for fifteen long years. His sister, who lived with her family in some recess of Idaho, was vacationing at Yosemite, and the letter was her duty missive to the brother who had arranged the reservations. It contained several snapshots of herself and her brood, and it was the last of the prints which started everything.

It showed a fallen tree, a huge redwood, completely blocking a forest road. In the foreground were men and machines about to move the prostrate giant; in the background were a scattered dozen of onlookers.

Mike was about to shovel the picture away with the rest when something about one of the watching figures caught his eye—and less than five minutes later he was talking with an old friend in the *Sun's* photographic lab. When Mike came back from lunch he found on his desk a big envelope containing a six-by-four blowup of the face he had circled in blue pencil.

It was with a genuine thrill that he showed it to Charles Tarbell, his immediate boss. Tarbell studied it and said, "So what?" and Mike grabbed a soft pencil and drew in a mustache and neatly trimmed imperial.

"Remember now?" he said. "That *Tomorrow* cover—about five years ago? *'The Men Behind the Atom'?"*

Tarbell sat up. He held the picture to the light and studied it. "Certainly looks like Bethlen!" he said. "You *sure?"*

"Ninety-nine and a half percent." Mike pulled out the original snapshot and slapped it on Tarbell's blotter. "Look at the woman beside him. I've never seen Bethlen in the flesh, but I have seen her. She's his wife. Remarkable actress—Anna Konrad. The Hungarian Bernhardt, they used to call her."

He was Yosemite-bound inside an hour. He drove fast and made

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Pineview Lodge by dinner time and before he went to bed had exhausted the possibilities of this hotel and the two others in the immediate vicinity.

But he wasn't discouraged. He slept, and by eight thirty the next morning was in his car again, pushing deeper into the lovely country of the Park. At the edge of a grove of towering, unbelievable trees he passed the fallen giant—almost a hundred yards of it—now pulled aside and lying parallel to the road. He was thinking what an ugly sound "redwood" was compared with the tree's true name, "Sequoia," when the road kinked and straightened and he found himself looking at a low, log-fronted building which bore the sign, SEQUOIA INN.

He was in luck. Judicious use of his press card and a ten dollar bill earned him freedom of the register, and less than five minutes after his arrival he was walking down a flagged path toward Bungalow Eleven. Which, according to the register, had been occupied for the past ten days by a Doctor Norbert Brandt and his wife. "Europeans," the clerk had said. "Real nice folks."

Surprised to find himself filled with an excitement he couldn't remember feeling since cubhood, Mike pressed the button next to the bungalow door. He heard quick footsteps inside—and the door opened. He tried to keep all expression from his face. He raised his hat and said, "Mrs. Bethlen?"

It was nine years since he'd seen her, and then it had been on the far side of Viennese footlights. But there was no mistaking her. The way she held herself. The way her chestnut hair, now gray-flecked, sprang away from her temples in two winglike waves. The way her great dark eyes stared at him.

For an instant there was a blaze of anger in them, and he saw lines around her mouth he hadn't noticed at first. But then the eyes half closed, and her lips parted in a smile which made her look ten years younger.

"And which journal is it," she said, "That you represent?"

Mike said, "*San Francisco Sun*. And I'm sorry—"

"But not enough to accept that my name is Brandt?" The smile became a laugh, still rueful but wholly amused. "Please, you had better come in, I think."

She held the door wide and Mike stepped past her into a small pleasant living-room with windows open to the forest. She took his hat and offered him a cigarette. She sat on the arm of a couch and said, "Someone has been very clever. It was you yourself?"

Mike said, "I was lucky." He told her about the snapshot, and grinned. "And after that—well, it was pretty easy. Why didn't your husband change the initials?"

"I know, I know! For a hundred times I have told that to Nikolas!" She saw Mike glance around at the

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inner doors. "But now you are not so lucky. He is not here." The eyes twinkled with friendly malice. "Almost you have passed him on the road, I think. A green auto—of middle age, not resplendent. Driving—oh, so slowly! With the number red and white from the state of Oregon?"

"Maybe I did," Mike said. "Where was he going?" He kept his voice flat, casual. Perhaps he overdid it, because she laughed again and said, "What do you think? That I will now—what is that word?—blurb out the information?"

Mike said, "Look, Mrs. Bethlen: sooner or later you and your husband will have to give interviews to the Press. If you don't, your lives are going to be a misery. Both of you are important people—what we call News." He spread his hands. "Why not start with me?"

She stubbed out the cigarette she was smoking and lighted another. She started to say something, then turned the sound into a cough.

Mike said, "There's another thing. I know you and your husband aren't what we call Security Risks. But if you persist in ducking the Press, if you keep on refusing any sort of publicity—well, people might begin to wonder. And that's dangerous. It shouldn't be, but it is."

She said suddenly, "You are nice. If it were I—I by myself alone—I would answer all the questions of everyone. Even the questions which are painful to a Hungarian who tries always not to think of what is happening to Hungary . . . But then I am—I was—an actress. To me, the publicity was the bread of life! But to Nikolas—" Her hands, her shoulders, her whole body completed the sentence.

Then Mike got an idea—more than an idea, a certainty. He said, "Doctor Bethlen's on his way to Ventana, isn't he? To the A.E.C. plant—the Atomic Energy Commission place? For a conference or something?"

She said, "You are *very* clever!"

At his maximum speed of thirty miles an hour, staying in the right-hand lane, Nikolas Bethlen drove toward Ventana and the A.E.C. plant. Beside him, almost filling the adjoining seat, was a pile of neatly stacked notebooks and folders, topped by the gray case of a portable typewriter.

He kept his eyes on the white-lined sweep of the highway as it unrolled across the wooded, hill-ringed bowl of the countryside—a countryside which still, although this was the third time he'd made the trip, seemed to him blatantly, overwhelmingly large.

He wondered about the feeling, which was uncomfortable. Perhaps it was a form of agoraphobia, he thought, induced by those three endless years of endless days he had spent in the eight-by-six stone-walled room his Slavic jailers had

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so pointedly refrained from calling a cell.

There was a sudden roar of motorcycle engines, and two State Patrolmen passed him. They didn't even glance at him, but at the sight of their uniforms—the helmets, the boots, the guns—every muscle in his body contracted.

His hands shook on the wheel, and he drew in deep breaths to steady himself. He studied the countryside, deliberately accepting its bigness, making himself reason that the bigness itself was an expression of freedom.

But he wished he weren't alone. Ahead the road seemed too long and too empty as it reached out for the pine-covered hills. And too lonely . . .

He saw her first as a dark blob by the roadside—a blob which slowly took shape and became a small female figure sitting precariously on an upturned suitcase.

She stood up as his car drew nearer, lifted the suitcase, which seemed suddenly big and heavy as its weight dragged at her left shoulder, and raised her right hand in the time-honored gesture of the hitchhiker. Although she stood straight there was a forlorn quality about her pose which would have brought Nikolas Bethlen to a stop even if he hadn't been braking already.

He leaned across to the open window and saw she was a child. Fifteen, he thought; sixteen at most. In spite of the sun she wore over a cotton dress a green coat which looked heavy enough for winter. She was hatless, and he was vaguely aware of brownish, shoulder-length hair. Her small face was dominated by her eyes, large and long-lashed and vividly blue.

Nikolas spoke first. "I am myself driving to Ventana. This will help you?"

The blue eyes smiled at him. "Oh, *yes!* Thanks a lot!" She caught sight of the notebooks and typewriter beside him and said, "I'll get in the back," and before he could offer to help, she had opened the door, lifted her suitcase in, and settled herself in the middle of the rear seat.

Not alone any more, Nikolas drove on, using his gears with religious care and settling back to his thirty-mile gait. He said, "I do not drive fast," and glanced at his passenger in the rear-view mirror.

She laughed. "Oh, that's okay. Just as long as we get there." The laugh was a light young sound, like her voice. "This is a real break for me. I'm heading for Los Angeles, and in Ventana I'll be sure to get a ride right through."

"It is good that I can help," said Nikolas.

Something about him—his voice, his manner, the way his lined face lit up when he smiled—loosed a flood of speech from her. "It's really Hollywood I'm going to—to get a job in the movies! Or maybe TV

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first!" Although the words were tumbling out, there was a strained quality in her voice—as if she were trying to keep excitement from carrying her away completely. "I bet you think I'm just a silly kid who's movie-struck! I bet you think I'm running away. But I'm not! I've finished school and I'm going to stay with my cousin who's in Wardrobe at Paragon Studios. She knows a whole lot of people in show business and she's going to get me started. She says it may be a long haul but she'll do it some way!" There was a deep breath, but it only heralded more words. "You see, it's not like I was just a beginner. I've been acting ever since I can remember. Not professional, of course—but all the time at school and two-three seasons at the Drama Club."

Another deep breath, and then silence. Enchanted, Nikolas Bethlen said, "So you are an actress, hein?" He kept his voice properly grave. "Tell me, which is the kind of part that you prefer?"

There was a pause; apparently this was a question that merited consideration. Then she said, "I always think if a person's a real actor, they should be ready to play *anything*. Even if they don't personally like it, I mean. Of course, my best parts have been Shakespeare. Portia and Juliet." She opened the worn handbag on her lap and rummaged in it. "We did *The Merchant* at school last year—and you ought to see the write-ups I got!"

Her hand came up with a thin wad of clippings, and in the mirror Nikolas Bethlen saw the sudden glance of doubt she darted at the back of his head. "You sound like you're from Europe," she said. "Do you know Shakespeare's plays?"

"Yes," said Nikolas. "Yes, indeed. I have myself been—in connection with the Theater. For many years." He heard the delighted gasp which greeted this announcement and hurried to cover up. "May I ask to which school of Portias do you belong? The light and the satiric? Or the mightily emotional?"

Again the pause for consideration, longer this time. "Both, I guess," she said at last. "But I never thought of it that way. To me it's like Portia sort of starts off kidding. Then when she's at the trial she begins to think maybe what she's saying really means an awful lot . . ."

So the child could think. It came as a mild surprise to Nikolas, but it was no preparation for the one that followed.

For another voice came from behind him. Not light and childlike, but rich and strong and rounded, giving the words not only their beautiful metric balance but the full weight of their meaning, "'*Though Justice be thy plea,*'" it said, "'*consider this: that in the course of Justice none of us should see salvation: We do pray for mercy, and that same prayer doth teach us to render the deeds of mercy.*'"

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Then silence—and the childlike voice again. "That's when Portia knows what she's saying is—well, important. Important to everybody, I mean, not just Antonio and Shylock—"

"Yes. Yes, indeed." Now it was sheer astonishment which Nikolas had to conceal. He said, "Tell me—it would be of much interest—which is the scene of Juliet's you prefer? As an actress?"

"Oh, the potion scene," she said. "Naturally!"

He stole a glance at the mirror—and held his breath as he saw a rare, true metamorphosis come over the small figure behind him. Here was no schoolgirl, Hollywood-bound; no self-assured Portia either. Here was a terrified girl who had just become a woman.

"'*O, if I wake,*'" she whispered, "'*Shall I not be distraught, environed with all these hideous fears? And madly play with my forefather's joints? And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud?*'"

His scalp tingling, Nikolas Bethlen waited. But only silence came, and he sensed that the minor miracle of metamorphosis had happened again—in reverse.

The silence went on and he wouldn't break it. It covered the last mile of the valley, and they had reached the hills and were beginning to climb before it was broken by a little self-conscious cough from behind him. Then he heard the voice of his passenger again.

"Pardon me," it said. "I don't mean to be fresh, but are you still connected with the theater?"

"No," said Nikolas. "No. Not now, not in America."

"I was only wondering." His passenger sighed. "My cousin Lottie—the one at Paragon—she says a person with talent mustn't miss *any* chance to get her first break. That was why I asked you. I didn't really think you could do anything." She sighed again. "Lottie says there's only two kinds of breaks. One's to get a part. The other's to be on the front page—never mind what it's about."

"Your cousin is perhaps too cynical," said Nikolas. He withheld another look in the mirror because the road, as it curved around the hillside on his left, had narrowed to two lanes. Although a wide grass verge separated him from the increasing drop on the right, he steered cautiously toward the center white line. He said, "Perhaps your cousin should say that a talent like yours cannot be hidden?"

"Don't worry," she said, 'I won't let it be!"

And there was such a sudden biting edge of determination in the words that, blind curve or no blind curve, Nikolas glanced at the mirror—

And at that moment an oil truck rounded the curve, rocketing down the hill toward them at more than fifty miles an hour—

If it hadn't been for that glance

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in the mirror, if he'd seen it from the first, the monster wouldn't have seemed so monstrous to Nikolas, wouldn't have filled the whole horizon. But he reacted much too sharply, wrenching at the wheel with both hands.

The sedan skidded, shuddering as its right front wheel slipped off the paving, met soft earth, and dug into it. It stood on its nose, hovered —and went over the edge, dropping ten feet in a cloud of spraying earth.

It rolled over, once, then lay on its roof, wheels spinning. Metal groaned, glass shattered, and two doors flew open, spewing out the typewriter, the suitcase, a cloud of papers . . .

The patrol car found it three minutes later. Climbing painfully out of it was a young girl with blood on her forehead. Inside it, a gray-haired man was jammed behind the wheel. He hung head-downward, dead or unconscious.

There was no sign of what could have caused the accident. But four miles south, on the main highway, the oil truck rumbled on, its driver serenely unaware of what had happened behind him.

The green sedan was still there, still upside down, when Mike Hackett came up the grade, driving fast. He probably wouldn't have seen it if the patrol car hadn't still been parked menacingly on the shoulder.

Mike slowed, stopped, looked over—and in his head heard an echo of Anna Bethlen's voice: "A green auto—of middle age, not resplendent . . . With the number red and white from the state of Oregon . . ."

He scrambled down the bank, pulling out his wallet. By the sedan two patrolmen were collecting heterogeneous litter from the grass. Mike showed one of them his Press card, asked some quick questions, and in less than two minutes was climbing up the bank again.

He jumped into his car and shot off up the hill, heading for Logwood City, the little town in the valley. The patrol car had belonged to Logwood City, and the patrolman had told him that Logwood City's hospital was where the ambulance had taken "the occupants" of the green sedan. As he drove Mike wondered about this plural: could Anna Bethlen have failed to mention a passenger?

He found the hospital at the end of a sunny main street. He was showing his card to the nurse at the desk when a door behind her opened and a tall heavy-set man in blue uniform came through it.

The nurse's spectacles glinted as she looked from the card up to Mike's face. *"San Francisco Sun?"* she said. "What can I do for you, Mr. Hackett?"

Mike said, "There was a wreck on the highway. Car went off the road, the other side of the hill—"

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The big man in uniform came up to him. He said, "Bob Erhardt, Police Captain," and held out a huge hand. "Maybe I can help you—"

From his own six feet of height Mike looked up at two small, quick eyes three inches above his own. He said, "I saw the wrecked car. What happened? Anyone badly hurt?"

"The kid's okay—scratch and a couple bruises." Behind the eyes was the question of why so august a newspaper as the *Sun* should be interested in a routine auto crack-up. "But the man's hurt pretty bad. Not critical, Doc Maxwell says. But maybe a skull fracture."

"H'm!" said Mike, and then, "Did you say *kid?*"

"Girl around fifteen. She was hitchin'. On her way to Los Angeles."

"H'm!" said Mike again—and the, "Funny sort of accident. How'd it happen?"

"That's what I'm just goin' to find out." The small eyes continued their scrutiny. "Care to step over to my office?"

They went out into the sun-drenched street and struck across it to a single-storey stucco building which announced iself, in important-looking letters, as Logwood City Police Department. The Captain's office opened off a square room empty except for a desk Sergeant behind a grille. Erhardt left the door ajar, pulled up a chair for Mike, and dumped his own bulk into the one behind his shabby desk. He looked at the door and bellowed, "Where's Jensen and that kid?"

"He's getting her a soda pop, Captain," came the desk Sergeant's voice. "Said they'd only be a couple minutes."

Erhardt's chair creaked as he tilted it back and looked at Mike again. He said, "All right, Mr. Hackett, what gives?" He was smiling, but he was also waiting.

That made it Mike's turn. "What's the injured man's name?" he said. "Is it Brandt? Norbert Brandt?"

"That's right." The chair creaked again. "So what, Mr. Hackett?"

Mike said cautiously, "There's a possibility that 'Brandt' is an alias . . . No, nothing in the criminal line. Far from it. Just a V.I.P. who's allergic to publicity." He was suddenly conscious of sounds and movement in the outer room and didn't say any more.

Erhardt said, "Now that's very interesting—" and stopped as the door was pushed fully open and a man in blue uniform stood in the doorway.

The man said, "Here she is, Captain," and stood aside as a small figure came hesitantly into the office. A small figure carrying over its arm a coat of heavy green cloth. A small figure with brownish, shoulder-length hair, a strip of surgical tape white on her forehead,

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and enormous vividly blue eyes. A small figure which looked lost and lonely and shaken.

Erhardt said, "Okay, Jensen, shut the door when you go out," and pointed to a chair near the desk. "You sit there, honey," he said. "And don't look so scared—nobody's goin' to eat you."

She came forward slowly, dropping the green coat on the bench against the wall where Mike had thrown his hat, then sitting to face Erhardt, her hands gripping the shabby handbag on her knees. The blue eyes, wide and frightened, darted a glance at Mike.

Erhardt said, "This is Mr. Hackett, *San Francisco Sun*. He saw the car and stopped by to ask about it." He pulled a pad and pencil toward him and picked up two report sheets. "Now, honey, this is what you told the two officers who found you. But we'll just go over it again, see? Sort of fill in the gaps . . . Your name's Barbara Clark? And you're sixteen years old?"

"That's right." The voice was childlike, with a quaver in it.

"And you live in Costelo? 895 South Street?"

"It's 895-*A*, really. That's the right number of my Aunt's house."

"Your Aunt? Where's your parents, honey?"

"They—they died when I was little . . ." The girl's hands shifted their grip on the shabby purse. "My Aunt's name's Mrs. Baker—Mrs. Christabelle Baker."

As he spoke again, Erhardt smiled at her, and Mike was suddenly sure the man had a daughter of his own.

He said, "Now then, Barbara—you were hitchin' a ride with Mr. Brandt?"

"Oh, is that his name? . . . Yes, I was. You see, I'm going to Los Angeles to stay with my cousin for a few weeks." The voice was steadier now. "My cousin's Miss Lottie Clark. She lives at the Harper Apartments in West Hollywood. That's 1124 San Carlo Boulevard."

Erhardt wrote slowly, then put down his pencil and sat back. 'Now look, Barbara," he said, "did your Auntie know you were goin' to hitch rides?"

The girl sat very straight on the straight chair. The lids came down over the blue eyes and a surge of color darkened her face. She said, "No . . . I just wanted to save the bus money—" Her voice was so low that Mike could barely hear the words.

"You ought to know better, honey," Erhardt said. "Look what just happened—you might've been killed." He picked up his pencil again. "There's other things can happen, too,"—and he made a business of studying the report sheets before he went on briskly, "Now about this oil truck, you say it came around the curve real fast. Was it over the white line? On your side?"

The girl's face was pale again. Paler than it had been before, Mike

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thought. She said, "No—I don't think so . . ." The blue eyes were clouded. "It's—it's sort of difficult to remember—"

"Yeah. You had quite a shaking up." Erhardt was sympathetic but determined. "But you gotta try, honey. It's my job to find out what made Brandt go off the road that way. What did he do—panic? Lose control? What happened?"

"I—I think he swerved too much . . . The wheel seemed to—sort of slip out of his hand."

Erhardt was writing, and Mike picked it up. He said, "Did you say *'hand'*, Barbara?"

It was the first time he'd spoken, and she turned her head to look at him—a movement quick as a startled animal's. Her deep blue eyes met his. Erhardt looked up and said, "What was that? Didn't he have both hands on the wheel?"

The blue gaze flickered back to him, steadied. "No," she said. "No, he didn't."

"Why not?" Erhardt asked. "What was he doing—lightin' a cigarette or something?"

"No," said the girl again. Her throat moved as she swallowed. She said, "He had his arm around me." Her voice was suddenly, desperately loud. She said, "He—he was trying to kiss me—"

The handbag fell to the floor as she ducked her head, covering her face with her hands. The thin shoulders shook to a sob. Her voice came muffled. "I didn't want to tell! . . . He was *horrible!* He scared me! . . . I didn't want to tell!"

(continued on page 34)

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**HUGH PENTECOST**
TITLE:	***Waterfront Shakedown***
TYPE:	Detective-Crime Story
INVESTIGATOR:	John Sturm
LOCALE:	New York City
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*The Case of the Conscientious Investigator—an amusing tale set in an unusual locale, the teeming docks of New York where ocean liners and freighters from round the world bring people, wares—and trouble.*

From Lucius J. Quinn
Princess Steamship Company
New York City

To Daniel Gebhardt
Chief of the Division of Investigation
Waterfront Control
New York City

My Dear Gebhardt:

You are probably aware that when the *Princess Henrietta* docked at Pier X in the North River yesterday, over two hundred longshoremen who were there to act as baggage porters walked off the dock, thanks to some dictator-like tactics by one of your investigators, thus leaving more than 900 passengers on the pier with no way to move their luggage. This is the worst kind of public relations for any steamship line, as you are well aware. Since Waterfront

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Control is supported by a tax of one-and-a-half per cent on the shippers' pay rolls, I feel entitled to some sort of explanation from you on the behavior of your investigator.

Sincerely,

Lucius J. Quinn
President

From Daniel Gebhardt
Chief of the Division of Investigation
Waterfront Control

To Investigator John Sturm

Please tape a full report of the events leading up to the walkout of longshoremen on Pier X yesterday afternoon.

From Investigator John Sturm

To Divisional Chief

As per regular routine and assignment I proceeded to Pier X yesterday afternoon as the *Princess Henrietta* was docking. My intention was, of course, to keep a sharp eye out for baggage shakedowns. One of the first people I encountered on the pier was Max Riley, shop steward for the union local in that area. He said hello and I said hello.

"I should think the port watchman could enforce the no-smoking rules," he said to me.

"I'll leave it to him," I said.

"You guys are always looking for trouble," he said.

"We sure are," I said, "and most of the time we find it."

"Some day you're going to find it in your own backyard," he said.

"Is that a threat?" I asked him.

"How touchy can you guys get?" he said.

That was the only exchange I had with anyone beyond saying hello here and there until after the ship docked and the passengers began to pour off to go into customs. One of the first things to come off the ship was a small foreign sports car and I see a dame standing by it. She is a tall dame dressed in a kind of mannish suit, with a kind of man's tweed hat on her head and dark glasses hiding her eyes. She is, I learned later, Miss Carola Carstairs, the famous Hollywood columnist. They say the top movie stars tremble at the very sight of her.

I am looking at her and noticing that, despite the mannish clothes,

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when she moves you are instantly aware that she is quite a hunk of woman. That may sound irrelevant, but it explains why I happened to stand there watching her.

"See here, my man!" says Miss Carstairs in a clear cool voice.

I thought she was speaking to me, since I'd been staring at her. It was hard to tell where she was looking with the sun glittering off those dark glasses. She wasn't talking to me, but to a longshoreman who just happened to be passing by.

Now this longshoreman is named William O'Hanlon, Waterfront Card Number OX9357, Coast Guard Number B6832. This O'Hanlon is known all over the waterfront as Willie the Weeper on account of he has invented more hard-luck stories than you could count up on an adding machine. In the old days he noticed the union was always passing the hat for some kind of collection for sick or injured members. So Willie O'Hanlon started passing the hat for himself—on account of his wife was in the hospital, five of his six kids were sick, and he had to have someone look after them while he worked in the holds of freighters to earn their bread and butter. Everyone was real sympathetic—until they found out Willie wasn't even married. Willie is the man Miss Carstairs hails.

"I need to get some gasoline to drive my car off the pier," she says.

Willie sizes her up. "I'll get you some gas, lady, while you're going through the customs," he says.

"I have been cleared by the customs," the lady says. "I am already late for the preview of a new motion picture spectacle. I want the gasoline now."

Willie's shoulders kind of hunch, and you can almost see the larceny squirming in his stomach.

"Gee, lady, I'd like to help you," Willie says, "but if I go off the pier now to get you gas I may lose three, four jobs. Maybe forty, fifty bucks in tips. I'd like to help you but—"

Miss Carstairs pops open her bag and produces some crisp lettuce. "You get me off this pier in ten minutes, my lad, and it's worth fifty dollars to me."

Now Willie hadn't put the screws on her, see? No intimidation—nothing I could really nab him for. But I waited around. Willie doesn't usually quit with picking just one apple off a tree.

Ten minutes later he's back with a five-gallon can of gas which he obligingly pours into the tank of the sports car for Miss Carstairs. She thanks him coolly and starts to get in behind the wheel.

"You got your Coast Guard pass, lady?" Willie asks.

She turns the dark glasses on him. "Coast Guard pass?"

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"You can't drive nothin' off the pier without a Coast Guard pass," Willie tells her.

"How do I get one?"

Willie shakes his head dolefully. "You'd have to have your birth certificate and go downtown and—well, it's a lot of red tape. But I have a pass, lady. I can drive it off for you."

"Fine. Hop in," says Miss Carstairs.

Willie weeps. "I'd like to, lady, but if I drive you off the pier I may lose another three, four jobs and maybe forty, fifty dollars in tips."

Miss Carstairs reaches for her bag again—but this time I move in.

"Okay, Willie. I guess you better come along with me," I said.

Now Willie is the kind of guy who might try sneaking out of an Automat with a sugar bowl under his coat and when he sees the manager bearing down on him he would drop the bowl and holler, "Who threw that?" As a matter of fact, what he said to me was, "Who's smokin'?"

"This man is practicing a shakedown on you, lady," I tell Miss Carstairs. "He gouged you good for getting the gas, but that's your business. Now he's really giving you the works. You don't need any Coast Guard pass to drive your car off the pier. Your customs clearance is all you need. Now, if you'll just come along with me and prefer charges—"

"Don't be an ass," says Miss Carstairs. "I'm already late for an important preview."

She hops in the car and—*whoosh,* she's gone. Willie stares at me, an injured look on his face.

"Why don't you keep your nose clean, Sturm?" he says.

"Come on, Willie," I said.

Then Max Riley, the shop steward, is at my elbow. "What the hell do you think you're up to, Sturm? No witnesses. No one to prefer charges. I told you that you guys were lookin' too hard for trouble. Well, this ain't Siberia!"

I don't know how he passed the signal, Mr. Gebhardt, but two minutes later every longshoreman on the pier dropped whatever he was carrying and walked off.

I have made a report on Willie for disciplinary action by the Control, with a recommendation that his waterfront card be suspended for thirty days. I also recommend that action be taken against Riley. My own activities I feel were conscientious and strictly according to Hoyle.

John Sturm, Investigator

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From Daniel Gebhardt
Chief of Division of Investigation
Waterfront Control

To Lucius J. Quinn
Princess Steamship Company

I have a full report on the actions of my investigator, John Sturm, at Pier X at the time of the docking of the *Princess Henrietta.* I find he acted conscientiously and correctly. We plan disciplinary action against individuals and the union in this matter.

Sincerely,

Daniel Gebhardt

To the Editor of *The Times*

Dear Sir:

As a world traveler of considerable experience, I should like to express my outrage at the treatment recently accorded me on the docks of your city. I had no sooner set foot off the boat on which I arrived when I was subjected to what I believe is called a "shakedown" in order to get my car off the pier. Surely the great city of New York should do something to prevent this sort of reception to friendly visitors.

Sincerely,

Carola Carstairs
Hollywood, California

To the Editor of *The Times*

Sir:

I noticed a letter in your edition of today inst. from Miss Carola Carstairs, the famous Hollywood columnist, complaining that she was subjected to a shakedown on the docks when she arrived in New York recently. It happens I was on duty on Pier X when the *Princess Henrietta* docked and was actually able to arrest the man who attempted the shakedown referred to. Like many other citizens who demand the protection of law enforcement officers, Miss Carstairs refused to take the time to prefer charges against this man. How can we protect visitors to our city if they refuse to do their duty as citizens?

Sincerely,

John Sturm, Investigator
Division of Investigation
Waterfront Control

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To The Mayor of New York City

From Miss Carola Carstairs
Hollywood, California

Your Honor:

I enclose two clippings from *The Times*. They are self-explanatory. Are visitors to your city subject to attack and insult by underlings in your law enforcement bodies?

Carola Carstairs

From The Mayor of New York City

To Harold Hyland, Commissioner
Waterfront Control

Dear Hal:

The enclosed letter and clippings tell their own story. Your "dish of tea," I think, old boy.

From Commissioner Hyland
Waterfront Control

To Daniel Gebhardt
Chief of the Division of Investigation

Dear Dan:

I don't drink tea. Sturm is your baby.

From Daniel Gebhardt
Chief of the Division of Investigation

To John Sturm, Investigator

Dear John:

Had I known you intended to write to *The Times*, I would have advised you to curb your literary talents. You have managed to stir up a hornet's nest from the Mayor on down. I am highly appreciative of your conscientious behavior, but conscientious or not, because of the general hue and cry I am forced to transfer you to the fruit boat piers on the East River for the time being. I doubt if you are liable to run into public relations difficulties with the bananas.

Gebhardt

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Clipping from *The Daily Graphic*

TARANTULA STRIKES IN NEW YORK HARBOR

An unusual accident has sent John Sturm, investigator for Waterfront Control, to St. Vincent's Hospital where he is suffering from the poisonous bite of a tarantula. Now, tarantulas do not thrive in the city of New York, but it seems that not only tarantulas but also poisonous reptiles are sometimes found in the holds of banana boats coming in at the East River piers from Cuba and other tropical ports.

Investigator Sturm, conscientiously doing his job, had gone down into the hold of one of these boats to arrest a man with a long criminal record who had somehow managed to attain a longshoreman's registration card by fraudulent means. The tarantula, evidently on the side of crime, prevented the arrest by biting Sturm on the left leg, hospitalizing him. Only quick action, say the doctors in charge, saved Sturm's life.

From John Sturm, Investigator

To Daniel Gebhardt
Chief of the Division of Investigation

Dear Mr. Gebhardt:

Thanks for your "Get Well" card. I should be out of here in a few days.

May I assure you that my literary impulses have had their one and only public exposure.

It may interest you to know that the tarantula which bit me was captured alive by a couple of Puerto Ricans on the hatch gang and is being kept on display as a sort of side show. Assuming it to be a female tarantula, I have taken the liberty of naming it—Carol.

Conscientiously yours,

John Sturm

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It is well known that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery—so consider yourself, John Dickson Carr and/or Carter Dickson, highly flattered. And it is equally well known that only the distinctive is imitated—so consider yourself, JDC and/or CD, one of the distinguished of detectivedom. For here is a clever and titillating parody-pastiche of Sir Henry Merrivale (harrumph), with more than a poking touch at Dr. Gideon Fell (harrumph), to say nothing of a sidelight or two on Colonel March (harrumph), all complete with locked room, miracle problem, and impossible crime. And it need hardly be said that the puzzle is typically Carresque and the solution no less Dicksonesque—or vice versa. So, with no apologies whatever, and in the words of the perpetrator himself, we present An Irreverence to an Old Master . . .

THE UNLOCKED ROOM

by JOHN F. SUTER

THE CARBON CASE IS ONE WHICH is seldom discussed in Uniontown, Pennsylvania. It was a case with overtones of antique lore harking back to the ancient Egyptians and beyond. A man died where he should not have died, and because of that, the affair was to become known to the principals as The Case of the Unlocked Room. Colonel Perrivale, who has been involved in more than one peculiar murder, has nothing to say about this one, although he was present from the time the body was found until the sticky moment when the murderer was unmasked.

It was the sort of case that would shake the calm of even a policeman . . .

Patrolman George Witmer had just come off duty. Still wearing his uniform, he was on his way home, with one stop to make on the way. Jon Dickens Carbon, the internationally famous detective-story writer, had promised to buy a ticket to the Policeman's Ball, and Witmer had been asked to deliver it.

Witmer eyed the sky uneasily, hoping to complete the ticket transaction and get home without wasting time. The gathering dusk was deepened by an evil, spreading blackness in the western sky. An unhealthy stillness in the air and an occasional fitful flicker on the horizon threatened the approach, in early June, of the summer's first thunderstorm. The effect was as

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though someone were lifting, briefly, the cover of an entrance to the Pit.

Witmer brought his car to a smooth stop directly across the street from the old brick three-story that was the Carbon house. It was one of a row of stone-stepped mansions with large back yards, and its ancient, lack-lustre red bricks badly needed re-pointing. Even the incongruous television antenna leaned at a gallows-like angle.

As Witmer climbed from his car and started across the street, he glanced upward. He could not be sure, but he thought he saw, momentarily, a figure looking at him from an upstairs window. The thing looked *wet* . . .

He crossed an undulating brick sidewalk and started up the three worn stone steps to the front door. Two crouching stone lions cast baleful eyes at him, and he was startled to observe that an irregular, damp trail crossed the top step, as though a giant slug had crawled over it.

He was about to ring when the door opened and a girl started out. She stopped short when she saw him.

"This response is almost unbelievable," she gasped. "Uncle Harry must have just hung up. No matter. He's upstairs. I'd better show you."

Witmer was stunned. He started to say, "It's not your Uncle Harry—" but no words came. If any had, they would have been concentrated in a single, explosive "Wow!"

Cynthia Diamond, at 23, was aware of the reaction which a combination of deep-copper hair, sea-green eyes, flawless creamy complexion, and a whistle-at figure customarily produced in men. She was the Goddess-Made-Mortal, the Living Dream, the Show Stopper. At any other time, she would have basked in the radiance of Witmer's reaction, but just now her attention was on other things.

Dazed, Witmer followed her into a shadowy hallway, barely noticing an elegantly furnished living-room on his right and a glowing dining-room at the rear of the hall. He trailed his guide's long, shapely, silk-clad legs up a high staircase at the left of the hall.

"Uncle Harry has already called Doctor Hauer," Cynthia was saying, "so you won't have to do that. I'm afraid that it's no good, just the same. It looks so *final*."

Witmer shook himself, realizing that none of this made sense. Jon Dickens Carbon was reputed to be an eccentric, and bedroom interviews were not unheard-of, but to buy a ticket—? The policeman paused at the head of the staircase, where the landing gave into a hall obviously leading to a group of bedrooms and baths.

"Stop a bit," he said. "It's Mr. Carbon I want to see."

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Cynthia's green eyes clouded. "You mean that Uncle Harry didn't make that clear? Or perhaps your captain or lieutenant or whatever-he-is didn't pass it on? Uncle Jon *is* the one. Up here is where he is."

A firm voice with Muscles in it cut in. "I suspect that the young man is somewhat confused, since I had not yet called the police when you brought him in, Cyn."

They turned. Witmer saw a man reminiscent of Charles Atlas in tweeds regarding him from a spot beside a telephone on a wall bracket. This new person had wavy, light-brown hair and a beautiful tan.

"Uncle Harry!" said Cynthia. She looked doubtfully at Witmer. "Then you really don't know—?"

"I dropped by to see Mr. Jon Dickens Carbon," Witmer said cautiously. "It sounds as though you have something else on your mind."

"Haven't we, though!" Cynthia's voice was ragged. "We can let you see Uncle Jon, but looking is all you'll be able to do."

"Steady." The muscular man crossed quickly to the girl's side and gripped her shoulders. "After-all, Cyn, Doctor Hauer hasn't had a look at him yet."

"But it's so *horrible,*" she shuddered. "He's in there like—that—and we daren't try to help him."

Witmer cleared his throat. "If this is police business, maybe one of you could show me what it is."

Cynthia reached with long fingers and grasped his sleeve, nearly causing him to forget that he was expected to behave like a policeman. She led him along the hall toward the rear of the house until they came to the last door. A strong odor of floor varnish came from the room.

"In there," she said, indicating the open door. "But mind the floor." She gave a half-hysterical laugh.

At first glance, Witmer saw only an empty bedroom, its oaken floor gleaming with wet varnish. It was only when he looked to his right that he saw it: the body of a middle-sized man lying in a crumpled heap in the corner.

Witmer had seen Carbon's photograph a few times—a slim-faced man with eyes full of sly humor—but he would never have recognized him in this rag doll with the contorted countenance. Even from eight feet away, Witmer could see the marks on Carbon's neck that signalled strangulation. It was not a pretty sight.

Then the short hairs on Witmer's neck lifted. He had noticed the varnish bucket standing beside the body on the uncoated segment of floor where Carbon lay. He had observed that a wide brush, sticky with varnish, was clutched in Carbon's outflung right hand. Sardonically, it had struck him that the man had painted himself into a

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corner . . . *a corner completely surrounded by still-wet varnish unmarred by a single footprint.*

Witmer turned quickly on his heel and faced the girl and the man.

"Is this some kind of hoax?"

Cynthia was biting her lip to keep back hysteria. "I—I swear that's the way I found him ten minutes ago when I went to ask him a question."

"But this is—"

"Impossible?"

The elephantine wheeze sounded loudly in the hall as the bedroom door at the far end—from the room overlooking the street—opened and a huge figure lumbered into view. It was an awesome sight: a gleaming bald head, a handlebar moustache, an array of chins, and ballooning figure. A walking stick was clutched firmly in each hand, and a third was crooked over the left arm.

"Impossible, would you say?" said this personage with a ferocious scowl. "Burn me, young feller, I'd not blame you. But, lookee here—have you considered that window, hey?"

Witmer swung around and stared at the room again. Opposite the door was a window overlooking the garden in the back yard. The sash was up, to allow the room to air, and Witmer could plainly see that the roof of the back porch gave easy access to the room.

"Why, yes—No. Stop a bit. You're trying to confuse me, sir. There are no footprints leading to that window, and it's too far to jump from the corner to the window sill."

The large man was now opposite the telephone, which protruded from the wall on a sort of lazy-tongs arrangement. He brushed the phone back with one of his sticks and advanced.

"Confuse you? Hmff, ha. I realize that what you say is true, yet — You must think about this, young feller. That's why I just finished a shower. I had to think, and I think best in the bath. Yet, if I were to say to Harry, here, *go soak your head,* he'd get his dander up."

"I think," said Witmer firmly, "that I had better call in and report this."

He stepped forward and found the tip of a cane resting against his chest.

"Now, lookee here, son," said the huge man. "Let's you and me work this out together, hey? Don't you think that it would be more to your credit than letting some cocksure detective lieutenant hog it all? Besides," he said, beaming and twinkling, "I'll include you in my mee-moirs."

"You haven't told me who you are, sir. Or who these other people are, either, if you'll forgive me."

The large man drew himself up. "Son, the dolly, here, the luscious

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wench, is Cynthia Diamond, Carbon's niece by his sister, Jane. Gargantua there, is Harry Cole, his half brother. As for me, I'm G.P., the Old Man—Colonel Goliath Perrivale, an old friend of Jonny's from across the Atlantic."

Witmer acknowledged the introductions and introduced himself. Staring at G.P., he said, "Colonel Perrivale? Of the British Army?"

Colonel Perrivale's chins waggled as he chuckled. "Army? Oh, my hat! It's a *Kentucky* Colonel. Honorary, of course, in memory of the time I bested Louisville's William Tecumseh Lee in a julep-swiggin' contest—Harrump! That has nothing to do with this, unfortunately."

"Your occupation, Colonel?"

"Retired. But occasionally I help the police to orient their brains, as it were. It hasn't been too long since I was involved in that Grimm's Fairy Tale business. Maybe you heard of it."

Seeing that Witmer was about to question the others, Colonel Perrivale rumbled on. "The little gel is quite a scientist, son. Works for the Appalachian Atomics Laboratory. Hairbreadth Harry, here, runs a glorified gymnasium which he calls a Reducing School. To give him credit, he does get results. Reduces their pocketbooks, too."

Impassive, Witmer noted this information. "Anybody else around when this happened?"

Cynthia spoke up. "But we don't know when it happened, do we?"

G.P. assumed a wise look.

Harry Cole cleared his throat. "That hardly matters. There have been only the three of us—and Jon, of course—since late afternoon. Wait a bit. There was Annie."

"Annie?"

"Our cleaning woman," said Cynthia. "But Annie was surely gone. She worked in a fearful rush. She even left her window-wiping squeegee lying in the hall earlier, instead of putting it away. And when I let Officer Witmer in, I saw that she had only mopped the front steps with a lick and a promise. She's not strong enough—"

Uncle Harry set his square jaw. "She ought to be riding her broom, instead of pushing it. She's strong enough to manhandle all this furniture by herself. She's not as frail as she looks."

Meticulously, Witmer asked for, and got, Annie's full name and address. "Now," he started to say. A violent peal of the doorbell cut him off.

Cynthia ran to answer it and returned with a small, neatly dressed man with a black spade beard and a doctor's bag. She introduced him as Doctor Hauer. The doctor wasted no time in small talk, but insisted on being taken to the room where Carbon lay.

As soon as he observed the situation from the bedroom door, he

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turned to them, his dark eyes glittering. "This," he snapped, "is intolerable. Someone get a board—old newspapers—anything."

"Go ahead," suggested Uncle Harry. "Don't mind the floor."

"It's not the floor that I care about," said the doctor peevishly. "It's my shoes."

Cynthia hurriedly vanished and returned with an armful of old newspapers. Partially unfolding them, the doctor laid them down ahead of him, making a path to the body.

Colonel Perrivale huffed up to the bedroom door. He now selected his third cane, performed some manipulations, and ended up flourishing a shooting seat. With unswerving aplomb he drove the point into the hall floor, then to Witmer's amazement he settled his bulk on the seat of the stick with ease, although Witmer could not have told you how this was accomplished.

G. P. pointed to the glistening floor with the ferrule of his right-hand cane. "The ancient Egyptians knew all about varnish," he wheezed, "but the lore goes all the way back to the Cro-Magnons in their murky caves. And men have been painting themselves into corners ever since. Varnish! I don't like this."

Doctor Hauer was examining the body with some incredulity. He looked around at Colonel Perrivale with anger and bafflement.

"Who is trying to pull my leg?"

Colonel Perrivale's shabby brows rose. "Pull your leg? Solons of Sparta! He was strangled, wasn't he?"

"Of course he was," snapped the doctor. "And he's dead, if anyone had any doubts. What I want to know is the reason for this jiggery-pokery." He stared at Colonel Perrivale, then his face cleared. "I should have known. You're that expert on 'locked room' cases. You attract them, as a lightning conductor attracts electricity. Well, let's see if someone *else* can't—"

He stopped and began to peer at every inch of space from floor to ceiling in the corner. G.P. watched him keenly.

"You want to see if someone else can't solve this?" the Colonel asked genially. "Go ahead. I assume that you're looking for a hook that one might string a rope on. Mister X kills Jonny, slings his body on a rope, and slides it across to that corner without touching the floor. He dumps the body, twitches the rope, and presto, an impossible crime! But it won't work."

"I see there is no hook," admitted Doctor Hauer.

"No. But you missed the critical point, Doctor. Oh, Bacchus! Where is the trail in the varnish that the loose rope would have to leave as it was pulled out of the room?"

"That's all very interesting," re-

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marked the doctor impatiently, "but it's not what I had in mind."

"No?"

"No! Why couldn't the killer simply have put the body into the corner and varnished the floor all around it, using another brush and another can of varnish?"

Colonel Perrivale blinked and cleared his throat. He was about to speak when Harry Cole cut in.

"Because there wasn't time for that." As they all turned to him, he went on. "Have you any idea how long that would take? That floor is covered completely. It should require at least an hour. And I talked to Jon while he worked, only about twenty minutes before Cyn found him. He was varnishing then."

"You seem determined to misunderstand me," said Doctor Hauer testily. "I didn't suppose that the whole room was unvarnished when the body was put there. What if Carbon had it all done except a narrow strip from corner to door, a strip for Carbon to come out on? *A strip which the killer could coat in just a few minutes?"*

Colonel Perrivale stared at the doctor with respect. "You know, that's a very shrewd observation. Burn me, it is. But I'm sure that it won't do, either. How long do you think it would take to coat that narrow strip, Doctor?"

The doctor contemplated the body and the floor. "Five to ten minutes."

"Even working at top speed?"

Doctor Hauer began to look uncertain. "Well—hang it, yes. The brush would have to be refilled several times."

Witmer spoke up. "With everyone's permission, we could make a test." As their attention turned to him, he went on, "If it's all right with Miss Diamond and Mr. Cole, I can varnish a strip of hall equal to the probable area Doctor Hauer means. I'll work as fast as I can." He glanced at Colonel Perrivale. "Then I want an explanation."

G.P. merely watched him with ferocious benevolence, withholding comment as Cynthia and Uncle Harry distractedly agreed to the experiment. As Uncle Harry rolled up the hall runner, Witmer carefully removed his coat and asked Doctor Hauer to hand him the bucket and brush.

"Now, if someone will time me . . ." he said, dipping the brush and working it against the side of the can to make sure that it had not stiffened.

As the doctor noted the time, Witmer filled his brush and began to varnish the floor, swiftly, but covering every inch. At the end of several minutes he stood up and looked at Doctor Hauer inquiringly.

"A little over seven minutes," said the doctor.

"And that's what tears it, son," beamed the Colonel. "Because I went to the door of that room and

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spoke to Jonny no more than five minutes before our Miss Diamond screamed. I wanted to ask him where to find a fresh bar of soap. I did not," he said, fixing a scowl on his face, "notice how much of the floor was covered, I'm sorry to say."

"You're right, I'm afraid," said Uncle Harry. "I heard your voices."

"But who would want to kill Uncle Jon, anyway?" asked Cynthia brokenly.

Colonel Perrivale regarded her closely. "You sure you want that question answered, dolly? True, Jonny was a solid citizen, even if he did get mixed up about electromagnets and guns and the difference between benzene and benzine. He never really offended anyone. But he had money, and both you and Hercules, there, could use some, couldn't you?"

"Take care," growled Uncle Harry.

"It would be useless to deny it," said Colonel Perrivale, unperturbed. "I happen to know that when Jonny's father—your stepfather, Harry, and your grandfather, gel—died, he left the bulk of the money to Jonny, with small portions to each of you. Further, Jonny was asked to administer your inheritances, and I'm sure that he hasn't handed it out fast enough to suit you. Finally, I suspect that all the money comes to you two on Jonny's death."

"I don't *need* the money," gasped Cynthia, deathly pale. "I have a job that pays me well."

"You said, yourself, that my business is successful," gritted Harry Cole.

Colonel Perrivale struck the floor with a cane. "Yes, I said that. But, Lord love a duck! How much of what you take in are you putting into the bank, eh?"

The three of them seemed frozen there, glaring at each other, then Cynthia stepped to Witmer's side and laid a hand on his arm.

"You don't believe these accusations, do you?"

Colonel Perrivale's thick eyebrows rose. "Accusations? I was only reciting facts and suggesting motives."

"What about your own motive?" asked Witmer quietly.

As a thunderous scowl gathered on Colonel Perrivale's face, Doctor Hauer laughed. "Bull's-eye! You *are* a suspect, you know, G.P."

Colonel Perrivale's face relaxed into shrewdness.

"So I am. Fairly put, son. Well—assuming that I *had* done Jonny in—which I'm not admitting—it would have been because he outright used my ideas, without ever paying me a cent for them. Oh, he let me appear in his stories, and I always got the credit for solving the case—which I'd outlined to him, in the first place. Paper credit. 'Take the cash and let the credit go,' is not a bad motto, I say."

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"Now," he said, struggling to his feet, "let me show you how our friend, Harry, could have done this little job."

"Blast you," raged Harry. "I've had enough of your lies!"

He lunged forward, aiming a fast right at Colonel Perrivale's head. The Colonel raised one of his canes with deceptive speed and whacked the oncoming fist across the knuckles. At the same time he reversed his other cane and drove its head into the pit of Harry's stomach. Cole collapsed, gasping and wringing his right hand.

"As I was saying," said G.P., "I'll demonstrate how it *could* have been done. First, Jonny Carbon has a reputation for painting himself into a corner. Let's suppose that, this time, he forgets to coat that corner and paints himself out of the door. He meets Harry in the hall. They have words, and Harry does him in. What next? Looking into the room, Harry sees the dry corner and remembers Jonny's habit. He's a strong man, and Jonny's only average weight, so what does Harry do? He picks Jonny up and chucks him across the wet floor, right where we found him."

He looked at Witmer, his eyes twinkling. "Well?"

Witmer stepped to the door of the bedroom and pointed. "What about the varnish can?"

G.P. gave a fat chuckle. "Good. Oh, very good. No, Harry could have pitched the body over there, but he couldn't have heaved the bucket without spilling some of the varnish."

He drew himself up. "D'you want to hear how it was really done, son?"

"Just a minute," said Witmer.

He turned and made a quick, but thorough, run-through of the bath and the remaining bedrooms. He came back looking satisfied. In his hand was a large paper bag, which bulged oddly.

"Forgive the interruption. Go ahead, Colonel."

"We must realize," rumbled G.P., "that Jonny was killed where we found him."

Witmer nodded. "I agree."

Colonel Perrivale paused and looked at him quizzically. "Hmff. Well. He was killed in that corner, and he was strangled. By some freak with long arms? No. By someone who weighs so little that he won't mar sticky varnish? Not even the ancient Egyptians could do that. Are there any lassos or bull-whips around the house, for long-distance strangling? No. You didn't find any just now, did you?"

"No."

Colonel Perrivale struck the floor with a cane. "No long-range implements? Stop a bit. *There is one.* Son, go back there and take that telephone off the bracket."

Witmer obeyed.

"Now, lift that folding contraption off the wall and bring it here."

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Witmer brought the expandable bracket and handed it to Colonel Perrivale. The Colonel grasped one end like a pair of tongs.

"Unusually long beggar," he commented, then pressed. The bracket expanded into a series of connected diamonds and shot far down the hall. Witmer now noticed that the far end seemed to have a pair of half-circular clamps which were closing.

"Know what this is?" Colonel Perrivale asked. "A lazy-tongs. You can make it do almost anything your hands can do." He manipulated it, picking up a small vase from a table and replacing it. "You could even strangle from a distance, if you knew how to use it."

He stopped and lowered his huge head. His moustache quivered. "And one of us does know how to use it. Why? Because they have these things all over the place in an atomics laboratory. They call 'em servo-mechanisms. Isn't that so, *Miss Cynthia?*"

Cynthia stepped backward, her knees buckling. Witmer grasped her by the arm. She tried to speak, but could not.

"She supposed that nobody would think of it when it held the telephone," said Colonel Perrivale softly. "I used to use one of these things when I was a mere nipper, to knock off plug hats, and I recognized it in short order. Of course," he shrugged. "She killed him just before she screamed for the rest of us."

Witmer beckoned to Doctor Hauer. "Look after her, would you, Doctor?"

"So," said G.P., beaming, "you can wrap it up as your own case, son. I make you a present of it."

"Thank you, sir," said Witmer, "but I can't do it."

"Eh?" said Colonel Perrivale. "But you must. I'm—"

"The Old Man? Yes. And do you know what I do in my spare time? I'm an odd-jobs painter."

He gestured toward the unlocked room. "This murderer didn't need any lazy-tongs, or servo-mechanism, or whatever you call it. *The varnish was unmarked because a strip of the floor* was *still unvarnished from the corner to the door when Carbon was strangled*. The murderer simply coated the floor behind him as he went out."

Colonel Perrivale glowered. "But the time it would take—you, yourself, proved that there wasn't time to do that."

"That's right," Witmer agreed, "if a *brush* were used. However, look at this." He opened the bag and took out a rubber-bladed, T-shaped object with a short, hollow, metal handle. "This is Annie's squeegee which she uses on windows, I imagine."

Before G.P. could protest, Witmer reached over and twitched one of the canes from his surprised

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fingers. Quickly he rammed the point of the stick into the hollow handle of the squeegee.

"All our murderer needed to do," the policeman said, "was to pour a puddle of varnish on the floor and wipe it back along the uncoated strip with this rubber blade. He didn't even have to stoop. I could do it in a minute or two, at most. Then there'd be plenty of time."

He held up the squeegee. "This is clean—all except the place where the blade and handle meet. There's a trace of varnish there. And there's other proof, I'd lay odds."

He looked steadily at Colonel Perrivale. "Your bath was a waste of time. Soap, alone, won't remove varnish. And I found the squeegee in your closet."

He reached out and grasped Colonel Perrivale's hand, turning it over. "Here on your hand is the final evidence. You've already told us your motive. Colonel, unless he wears gloves, the painter doesn't live who can handle paint without getting his hands smeared."

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IN THE COURSE OF JUSTICE

by PHILIP MacDONALD

(continued from page 15)

It was a few minutes past noon when Maggie Gray saw, and recognized, Nikolas Bethlen.

For nearly ten years—ever since, as a childless war-widow of twenty-five, she had purchased the then moribund local newspaper—Maggie had represented the Press in Logwood City, and on the masthead of *The Logwood Courier* (Every Thursday—10¢) was the legend "Margaret Livingston Gray —Editor and Publisher.

As she was also Feature Writer, Book Critic, Rewrite, and Assistant Printer, she was more than frequently overworked. But she took it all in her long, easy stride. With reason, she was proud of the paper —out of which, without fanaticism, she had made a life as well as a livelihood.

When she saw Nikolas Bethlen, she was coming out of the general ward in the hospital, where she'd been interviewing the local centenarian. Two nurses were wheeling a patient out of the X-Ray Room. They smiled greetings and Maggie said, "Hi! Who's the new inmate?"—and looked down at the unconscious man on the stretcher.

Some freak of shadow from the sheet which covered him made it look for an instant as if his chin were divided by a neat imperial, and Maggie's card-index memory flipped over, coming up immediately with a picture labeled, "Nuclear Scientist—Hungarian—Bethlen—55—Married Anna Konrad —*Where is he?*"

One of the nurses answered her spoken question. "Auto accident," she said. "Name's Brandt. X-ray for possible skull fracture."

"Critical?" said Maggie. She looked down at the man's still face again, keeping her own expressionless.

The nurse shook her head, and Maggie muttered something noncommittal and walked off along the corridor. She didn't use the elevator, but ran down the single flight of stairs to the lobby. She stopped running before she came within eyeshot of the desk, and crossed toward it with what she hoped was her usual gait. Mentally she was rehearsing how she would casually extract from Bess Hunter at the desk all the information she could, when the door opened to admit the solid, blue-uniformed figure of Alfred Grubb.

"'Morning, Alfie," said Maggie, who had known him since he was eleven and had charged fifty cents to mow her lawn.

He touched his cap in salute, but didn't return her smile. It was plain

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that this morning he was Officer Grubb of the Logwood City Police Department, very much on duty. He reached the desk a few steps ahead of her and said to Bess, "Case of Brandt? Norbert Brandt? Where do I find him?"

"Still unconscious." Bess Hunter looked up, her spectacles flashing under her cap. "Doctor says no visitors."

From his pocket Officer Grubb took a folded paper and unfolded it, holding it for Bess to see. "Not a question of visitin'," he said. "Detained pendin' investigation. I gotta stay in with him." He tapped a pocket. "Gotta take notes if he does any talkin'."

Maggie stood very still. She wished she could make herself invisible. She wished her heart wouldn't pound so loudly in her ears.

But she needn't have worried. In the first place, Bess was far too excited by this dramatic break in routine to notice her; secondly, nothing was said worth hearing. Because Bess got up, marched out from behind the desk, and said, "We'll have to check with Dr. Maxwell," and led Officer Grubb across to a door marked STAFF ONLY.

Maggie went out into the street, heading for the Police Station, forcing herself to walk slowly. She couldn't believe it and yet she had to! A ripe, juicy, world-wide exclusive for *The Logwood Courier!*

Her mind began to play with headlines—*DISCOVER MISSING SCIENTIST—ATOM EXPERT FOUND, HELD—REVEAL DISAPPEARING HUNGARIAN—SCIENTIST CHARGED—*

But charged with what?

As she reached the station, a woman and a teenaged girl came out of it. The woman, who had her arm protectively around the girl's shoulders, was the wife of Officer Jensen and also, when one was needed, Logwood City's police matron. She nodded affably to Maggie as they passed but said nothing. Maggie went into the building.

She found Sergeant Rodzinski behind the grille and said, "Captain Erhardt in?" As she spoke, she heard Erhardt's voice from behind the closed door of his office. And another man's.

Erhardt had just handed the telephone to Mike. The San Francisco circuits had been busy, but were clear now. "Your call's through," Erhardt said, and Mike said, "Thanks," took the receiver, and sat on the corner of the desk.

Frowning, he said to the telephone, "Mr. Tarbell, please. Mike Hackett." He looked like anything but a newspaperman with the biggest exclusive of the year.

He didn't feel like one either. He felt—he didn't know quite how he felt.

"Mike?" came Tarbell's voice. "What you got, boy? Right man?"

Mike said, "Yes—" and found himself stopping there.

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"What's the matter? Give you the slip?"

Mike said, "No," and this time heard himself going on, staccato, "I'm right behind him. Have something by tonight. Might be real big—better not break anything yet. Thirty for now."

He hung up, scowled at the floor, felt Erhardt's eyes on him, and looked up to meet a stare of blank, frank astonishment.

Erhardt said, "What's cookin', Mr. Hackett? Why you holdin' off?" Visions of his name in the *Sun* late editions (*The arrest was made by Logwood City's able Police Captain*) were fading.

"Let me think a minute." Mike stood up and began to pace. He heard a tap at the door, then a female voice, "Can you give me a minute, Bob?"

"Hi, Maggie," said Erhardt, and after the faintest hesitation, "Come on in."

Maggie stepped into the room, shutting the door behind her.

Erhardt said, "Like you to know Mr. Hackett—from the *San Francisco Sun*." He was worried and bumbling and over-genial. "Mr. Hackett, meet Mrs. Gray—our local Press."

Maggie kept her face blank to hide the shock of disappointment. She thought, *I might have known!*

She looked at the man—tallish, lean, forty, with a thin, clever sort of face and a frown he'd forgotten to take off. She did'nt think she liked him. A pity—because she did like his work. At the sound of his name her mental card index had come up with the entry, "Hackett, Michael, *Sun* Waterfront Series—Pulitzer '54."

"How d'you do, Mr. Hackett," she said.

Mike mumbled something which might have been, "Nice to meet you." His eye recorded slim straightness, short dark hair, a direct hazel gaze.

Erhardt waved Maggie to a chair and cleared his throat. But she didn't give him a chance to speak. She looked at Mike and said, "I'm a great admirer of your work. But I wish I'd met you some other time."

Mike didn't speak, and Erhardt said, "Huh? What's that?"

Maggie said, "I thought I had an exclusive. Imagine—the *Courier* with a real beat. World-wide!" She managed a laugh. "But I still want in, Mr. Hackett."

Mike had wandered over to the window and was staring into an alley. He turned around. "Am I supposed to know what you're talking about?" he said.

"That accident case," Maggie said. "'Norbert Brandt'! Ha!"

She saw a worried look in Erhardt's eyes, and careful blankness in Mike's. "Suppose we stop fooling," she said. "Suppose we just call him Nikolas Bethlen."

Mike went on looking blank, but Erhardt said, "You always were

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the bright one, Maggie!" He chuckled, and it was an obviously spurious sound.

Maggie said, "Today's Wednesday. I go to press at five." She looked at Mike, hard. "All I want's a crumb. What's Bethlen being held for?"

There was silence—until Erhardt said, "We better tell her, Mr. Hackett. If we don't, she'll walk out that door and get the dope in ten minutes."

Mike crossed to the desk, perched on the edge of it, and looked down at Maggie. He said, with no inflection, "There was a girl with Bethlen in the car. Sixteen. Hitchhiker. She says he was making a pass at her when they went off the road."

Maggie's lips made a soundless whistle. She glanced at Erhardt and said, "That the kid I saw with Mary Jensen?"

"That's right." Erhardt nodded. "Mary took her over to Joe's for a hamburger."

Maggie looked up at Mike. "Your paper, Mr. Hackett? I'm sure you must've phoned them."

Mike said, "Yes. I did. But I didn't give 'em anything." He stood up. "And for your information, Mrs. Umm, I didn't give AP anything either. Or any agency. The only people who know where Bethlen is, and the spot he's in, are right here in this room."

Maggie stared. "But why sit on it?" She was incredulous. "*Why?* . . . Or are you trying to stall me?"

Mike glowered and wandered back to the window. A cat was playing in the alley and he watched it blankly. Behind him, Maggie said to Erhardt, "I don't get it. This is News—with a capital N!"

Mike turned around. "I don't like it," he said—and wished he didn't feel such a fool. "Bethlen's a great man. He was in a Red jail for three years before the revolution broke him loose. Because he wouldn't work with 'em." The words weren't coming right, but he struggled on. "Then a fantastic bit of luck gets him over here, where he can be free—and useful. Tremendously useful! And what happens? He gets in a spot where he can be smeared for life. Ruined. Just on the dubious word of some teenage brat he gave a lift to!"

"But it's *news!*" Maggie was vehement. "Who are we to withhold it? And if the girl's lying, it'll come out and he'll be exonerated—"

"For Pete's sake!" Mike exploded. "How naive can you get! Once put this on the front page he's stuck with it for life. You know that. Half a dozen certificates from the Supreme Court wouldn't make any difference!" He stopped abruptly, conscious he was shouting.

"I just don't get it," she said. "What's this girl done that you don't believe her? Why shouldn't she be telling the truth? Do you know her? Did you ever see her

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before?" And then she said quickly, not giving him time to answer, "Or do I have it backwards? Is it Bethlen you know? Or his wife?"

Mike said, "I met Mrs. Bethlen this morning. Talked to her for half an hour." He kept his voice low, looking at Maggie steadily. "I'm glad you raised the point, Mrs. Umm—"

"Name's Gray, Mr. Hackett."

Mike said, "She's been married to Bethlen over twenty years. If he was the child-molester type, she wouldn't still be with him. Take it from me."

"Did you tell *me* not to be naive!" Maggie sat up straight. "Psychopaths like that don't always show on the surface. Not even to their families." She glanced at Erhardt. "Remember the Vanetti case, Bob?"

"Sure," said Erhardt, and looked at Mike. "She's got something there, y' know."

Mike grunted. They were right—as far as they went. But neither of them had met Anna Bethlen—so they were wrong. He was furious with them, with the world, and with himself. If he had to play Galahad, what had made him choose this time and place? And this woman?

He went back to the window. Behind him he heard her say to Erhardt, "What do you think about this girl, Bob?" and Erhardt's reply, "Seemed a real nice kid to me. Not fresh like some of 'em."

"But is she on the level? Did you believe her?"

"Yeah. Guess I did . . . And I don't go for what we know about the man. Why's he gotta *hide* this way? He's even got his driver's license in the Brandt name. *And* his car registration!"

"He has! Isn't that against the law?"

Mike wheeled around. "What *is* this?" he said. "Persecution Week in Logwood City?"

A dark flush showed under the smooth tan of Maggie's face. She said, "I don't think I like that, Mr. Hackett. I was merely curious."

Mike said carefully, "To my knowledge, Mrs. Gray, there's no law anywhere in this glorious free country of ours that prohibits a man from calling himself anything he wants to—unless he uses the alias for a nefarious purpose."

"Thank you. That's very interesting." The blood had ebbed from Maggie's face, leaving it pale. But the hazel eyes stayed on Mike's—and he felt a sudden discomfort.

He came forward to the desk again. "We got sidetracked," he said. "I was supposed to be telling you why I didn't believe the girl. And maybe the quickest way to answer that is by asking a few questions of my own. Why didn't she complain to someone about Bethlen sooner? Why didn't she tell the cops who found her? Or the nurses at the hospital? Why didn't she even *hint* anything till after she'd

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overheard us saying Bethlen was a Somebody, *and* after she knew she was talking in front of a newspaperman?" He looked from Maggie to Erhardt. "That's quite a bunch of Why's," he said.

Erhardt shrugged. "I don't see they gotta mean anything. Not necessarily. If you hadn't picked her up about that one hand on the wheel, she likely wouldn't have told us at all."

Mike said, "Sorry, I don't agree. I think she dropped that 'one hand' for bait. And I wasn't too sure about that crying fit she pulled, either."

Maggie said, "I think maybe you don't understand girls, Mr. Hackett. Young girls. Not the way Captain Erhardt and I do. After all, I've been one—and he's got one."

Mike felt his control slipping. "Since when do I have to sire a brood to know human beings!"

Suddenly she smiled at him. A quick warm smile. He was amazed—and off balance for the moment. He wondered what she was going to say.

Whatever it was, she didn't get a chance to say it. Because on the desk a buzzer sounded and Erhardt picked up the telephone.

He said into it, "Erhardt speakin' . . . Oh yeah, Doc—" and then listened for what seemed a long time before he said, "Well thanks, Doc—you'll call me, then."

He hung up. He sat back and glanced at Mike, then spoke to Maggie. "Well, Brandt—uh, Bethlen—he's not so bad as they figured. No skull fracture. Shock and concussion. May come out of it any time."

A notebook had appeared on Maggie's lap and there was a pencil in her hand. All trace of the smile had gone. "All right, Bob," she said. "Let's get to work. I want some detail." She didn't look at Mike. "Girl's name, age, address—" She broke off at a sudden thought. "Hey! Have you been in touch with her family?"

Erhardt shook his head. "No contact yet. Got the calls in though. One for her home in Costelo. One for her cousin in Los Angeles."

Mike tried again. He didn't like the notebook. He said, "Look, Mrs. Gray—are you absolutely determined to break this story right away?" He was very careful, keeping his anger down, keeping his voice level and controlled. "Can't you put yourself in Bethlen's place a minute? Suppose *you* were a refugee. Suppose *you'd* suddenly made it to America after three years in a concentration camp. Suppose—"

She slammed the notebook down on the desk and stood up. "And suppose you stop tilting at windmills! You know as well as I do a thing like this can't just be *hushed!* Not with a man like Bethlen . . . And what possible difference can it make if we break the story now or someone else does tomorrow?"

"For Pete's sake!" Mike's voice

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was rising again. "All I want you to do is not go off half cocked! All I'm asking for is a few hours' delay".

"Waiting for what? A miracle?"

"It damn near took one to get him over here. What's the matter with another?"

She didn't say anything, just went on staring at him. He couldn't remember ever having disliked anyone so much as he disliked this woman—and was surprised by the irrational discovery that in an odd way she was extremely attractive.

Suddenly he felt tired. Very tired. "Oh, hell," he said, "what's the use—" and turned away from the desk. He felt as if he'd been in this shabby little room for days. He had to get out of it—away from the faded brown walls and battered furniture and clumsy old safe. Away from the sight and taste of policemen and their work.

He looked around for his hat and saw it on the bench beside Miss Barbara Clark's green coat.

He crossed to the bench, picked up the hat, and made for the door. Conscious of surprised eyes watching him, but not caring about them, he crossed to the door and went out, closing it behind him.

Nikolas Bethlen fought his way out of a maelstrom of whirling grayness and was conscious. Aware of himself—and aware of pain. Sharp stabs of pain in his body, a sluggish mass of pain in hs head.

He was lying in a bed. Dully he wondered what bed and how he came to be in it. He wanted to open his eyes, but the lids were too heavy.

Somewhere in his head, underneath the pain, memory began to stir . . .

An automobile. And a child, a girl. Ah, yes—the Theater! Anna? No, no, not Anna but the child. Portia? No, Juliet—that was it, *Juliet!* A wonderful child, a potential genius! Anna must be told, and at once. Something must be done. Obscurity was no place for a talent like this.

His eyes opened. They saw bare cream-colored walls, a shaded window, a dresser—

And on the dresser a cap. A man's cap. Stiff and military. Dark blue cloth with a shining black visor.

The mere sight of it brought the all-too-familiar constriction to his stomach muscles. He held his breath, and heard the breathing of another man. He lay rigid, and moved his eyes in the direction of the sound.

The owner of the cap sat on a chair beyond the dresser. Everything about him matched the cap and what it stood for. The dark uniform. The bright buttons. The belt and holster and gun butt. The bulky shoulders and stupid young face. Even the flaxen hair, clipped to a bristling mat.

Nikolas lay stiff and motionless.

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Fear swelled in his throat—and beads of sweat burst from his face and body.

The Plaza Bar and Grill is halfway down Logwood City's main street, two short blocks from the police station and the hospital. The clock over the bar showed twenty minutes to two, and the lunch hour being over, the place was empty. Except for Mike and the bartender.

Mike sat at a table in the window. There was a fresh drink in front of him, and a half-finished sandwich.

He was thinking—or, rather, trying to sort out an untidy mess of thoughts. Trying to make some sort of reasonable pattern out of them so that he could decide what to do.

If there *was* anything to do. The more he thought, the more he doubted it. Maybe it was all right to play Galahad—maybe!—but Galahad without a sword didn't make much sense.

The woman was so right. What difference did it make to Bethlen whether the *Sun* broke the story today or somebody else did it tomorrow? Because it was going to come out. It had to—whether Bethlen was charged or not.

But wait a minute! Suppose it could be *proved*—before the story broke—that Miss Barbara Clark was lying in her teeth?

But wait again! This was a pipe dream. The whole business was one of these your-word-against-mine deals. No witnesses. No gremlin with a tape recorder in the back seat of that car.

And the dice were loaded against Bethlen. Clear-Eyed American Girl versus Foreigner . . .

Mike slumped back in his chair. He was getting nowhere fast, and didn't like the sensation. He reached out for the drink and drained half the glass at one gulp, flinching from the thought of how he was going to explain all this to Charlie Tarbell . . . and found himself wondering about this woman Gray—about Maggie. And what she was doing. A clear picture of her came to him—pounding away on a typewriter, eyes intent, fingers flying.

But Maggie wasn't at a typewriter, wasn't even in her office. She was in the small house of Officer Jensen of the Logwood City Police Department. With Mary Jensen and Mary Jensen's charge.

Everything in the Jensen kitchen was white and chrome, even the clock above the built-in oven. As Maggie glanced at it, its hands stood at five to two. She finished the coffee in her cup and looked across the gleaming table top at Barbara Clark.

The girl was sitting stiffly on a chrome chair, the way she'd been sitting ever since Maggie had arrived, twenty minutes ago. Her blue eyes were wide, fixed un-

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blinkingly on Maggie's. There seemed to be a curtain over them, matching the deliberately wooden blankness of her young face.

I remember that feeling, Maggie thought. *I remember making myself look just like that! Whenever They insisted on talking about something I didn't want to talk about because it was too private . . . like Aunt Miriam and the Facts of Life.*

In her mind she began to frame the next question she'd ask the girl. Carefully. She wondered why she was taking all this trouble. It was cruel, and unnecessary, and she despised herself for doing it. She believed the child completely, so why keep on at her? Why prolong the agony just because some man she barely knew had a bee in his bonnet?

She had the question ready. "Look, Barbara," she began—and was interrupted by Mary Jensen, who came forward, coffee pot in hand, and said, "A drop more, Mrs. Gray?" Mary Jensen leaned over the table with her back to Barbara and darted a warning glance at Maggie as she refilled her cup.

"Oh, thank you." Maggie blandly ignored the glance and looked at the girl again. "Listen, Barbara," she said, "I don't want to worry you any more than I have to, but suppose you tell me a little more about this man. For instance, did you flag him? Or did he stop and offer you the ride?"

"Oh, it was me who stopped him. I was thumbing." A faint shadow of surprise showed in the blue eyes. "And when he said he was going clear to Ventana, I was real pleased. He seemed such a nice old man . . . You'd never of thought—to look at him, you'd never think—" The young voice stumbled, trailed off. Somewhere in it was the ghost of a sob, and the wooden mask was cracking.

"It's all right, Barbie. It's all right, dear—" Mary Jensen put down the coffee pot, slid into the chair next the child's, and put a plump, protective arm around the thin shoulders. She frowned indignantly at Maggie. "I don't know what Captain Erhardt meant for you to do," she said, "but it seems to me this kid's had enough for one day!"

Maggie pushed back her chair. "I think you're absolutely right," she said, and got to her feet. She felt extraordinarily uncomfortable—very much in the wrong and very angry with the man Hackett for being the basic cause of her discomfort.

"Don't you misunderstand me, Mrs. Gray!" Mary sounded apologetic now but the arm around Barbara's shoulders tightened. "I don't mean to speak out of turn—but what I'd like to see you do is write all this up in the paper. Tell the people the truth! Make 'em see what we get for letting these foreigners ride all around the coun-

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try!" If she'd tried for a week, she couldn't have found words more likely to change Maggie's frame of mind.

It changed, instantaneously, and Maggie said sharply, "Now wait a minute! How could the man's nationality—"

But she left the sentence unfinished. From the corner of her eye she had seen a movement of Barbara's head—and now, looking at the girl, she found the blue eyes staring at her in a new and unreadable way. She said, "What's the matter, Barbara?" wondering what the look could mean.

It presaged tears apparently, because the young face crumpled for the first time, and the words that came out of it were half choked. "Oh *no!* It doesn't all have to be in the papers, does it? . . . Oh, *please*—" The sobs came—ugly, racking sounds—and the child twisted around in her chair and buried her face in Mary Jensen's shoulder.

"But, Barbie, honey," Mary crooned over her, "I told you Mrs. Gray was from the local paper. Right when she came in I told you—"

"I—I—didn't understand—" The sobs were coming faster now. "I want Auntie Chris, I want my Auntie Chris!" The muffled wail was followed by a storm of weeping.

Convinced again—completely convinced now—Maggie felt worse than ever. Over the child's head Mary Jensen waved her away and she got to her feet and crossed to the back door. As she opened it, she heard Mary's voice behind her, "Don't take on so, dearie . . . Stop crying now, and we'll try your Auntie's phone again."

Maggie let herself out of the house and into the sunshine. She was hot with embarrassment and self-blame, and blazing with anger against the man Hackett.

She was halfway down Main Street when she saw him. He was coming out of the Plaza Bar, only a few yards ahead of her. She caught up with him and said, "Mr. Hackett—" in a voice which stopped him in his tracks.

He turned, saw her, and tipped his hat. He didn't say anything, but his eyes met hers and she felt the anger melting away from her. For no reason she could think of.

But she had to tell him. "I—I've just been talking to Barbara Clark," she said, and saw a question in his eyes. But he didn't say anything, and she went on. "After you left I realized I had to find out for myself. Because I—the fact is I don't like slinging mud any more than you do."

"Well, bully for you," Mike said. His tone was flat, and there was no way of telling whether he meant to be satirical or not.

She wanted to kick herself. What had made her tell everything the wrong way around?

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"I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Hackett —but you're wrong about her. She's just a nice, ordinary kid who's had a nasty experience. And every word she says is the truth!"

He looked at her, completely poker-faced now. He said, "Well, if that's the way you feel—" and was turning away when a thought seemed to strike him.

He looked at her again and said, "So you're convinced. But were you completely on the level about being sorry?"

"Yes," Maggie said. "Completely." She wondered what he was getting at.

"Okay," he said. "Then maybe you'll do something for me. It'll take only an hour of your time—no more, I promise you."

(continued on page 72)

A Reader-Service Directory—

CURRENT MYSTERY & SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	ON SALE DATE
Booth, Edwin	DEATH ON A SUMMER DAY	Arcadia House	$2.95	July 1
Carr, John Dickson	IN SPITE OF THUNDER	Harper	3.50	June 22
Crane, Frances	DEATH WISH GREEN	Random House	2.95	June 7
Halliday, Brett	DOLLS ARE DEADLY	Dodd, Mead	2.95	June 15
Jepson, Selwyn	VERDICT IN QUESTION	Doubleday	3.50	June 17
Laing, Alexander	THE CADAVER OF GIDEON WYCK	Macmillan	2.95	June 8
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Ransome, Stephen	THE UNSPEAKABLE	Doubleday	2.95	June 3
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Waugh, Hillary	ROAD BLOCK	Doubleday	2.95	June 17

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **DANA LYON**

TITLE: ***Six Stories in Search of a Solution***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Officer Hogan

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *No motive, no weapon, no truth—but no doubt whatever of a corpse with a bullet in her heart . . . a zany change of pace.*

IT WAS ONLY IN THE ARCHIVES OF Homicide that it was known as "the impossible murder," although even this was, of course, impossible on the face of it; for there was undoubtedly a corpse that had been murdered. It was a neat corpse, shot cleanly through the heart, with little blood and no gun found, and a convenient husband to pin it on; and so, of course, it could not actually have been impossible.

What was impossible was the hope of any kind of solution, since even a matter of circumstantial evidence needs something in the way of logical evidence to bolster the prosecution's claims.

And Homicide had nothing: opportunity but no motive; a suspect but no evidence; witnesses but no truth. As far as this latter was concerned, they had altogether too many witnesses, and, as matters turned out, the numerous and appallingly uninhibited accounts of what happened on that particular evening were so unbelievably varied that Homicide was never able to untangle them.

"Look, Chief," said Officer Hogan, who'd been doing the investigating, "here's this woman dead, and her husband looking scared to death, and that damn poodle yipping all over the place, and the husband telling me all the screens were locked from the inside when he got home from his walk with the pooch —about eleven thirty that night, it was—and he'd left the door latched and no one had broken in. Well,

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there she was, alive and well when he left; he comes back in thirty or forty minutes—didn't meet a soul, mind you—and—"

"Okay," said Captain Fitzmaurice, "so he's lying. Why couldn't he just have shot her and called us up and—oh," he finished slowly, "I see."

"Sure," said the harassed officer. "If he did it, what kind of a dope would he be with that kind of story? Why wouldn't he unlatch a window or two while he was waiting for us, so he could pull the old tramp story on us? What did he do with the gun? Why didn't he make up a better yarn while he was at it?"

"Doesn't let him out. He might have been too dazed to think fast."

"That's only part of it. Wait till you hear this. We couldn't book him, of course, without more evidence than we had, so today I go around visiting the neighbors to see what gives. They live in a place up in the East Hills—you know, the one where a lot of the houses started to slip down last year after the bad rains—"

"They bought *those* houses?" the captain said incredulously.

"Yeah. They got twenty-thousand-dollar places for four or five and got 'em propped up with jacks while they're waiting to have some work done on 'em. Darnedest setup you ever saw."

"Well, go on," said the captain moodily. "What did you find out from these screwy neighbors? They know anything?"

"They knew *everything*. Look, Chief," he added earnestly if somewhat hopelessly. "You know the kind of people that gang up with a made-to-order story for some guy they like? You know how easy it is to break down that kind of alibi?"

"You mean that's what they've got? What you worrying about, then? Get 'em to repeat it a few times and they'll trip over their own lies."

Officer Hogan looked steadily at his superior. "No, sir," he said. "Those people did not give me one story—they gave me *six* stories! That's how many of them there are. They're all screwy, I tell you."

"Drunks?"

The officer shrugged. "Only so-so. You know, raise hell on Saturday nights, go to P. T. A. meetings the rest of the time. Just—well, nuts. Sober enough when I talked to 'em. I took 'em all separately, of course, so none of 'em would know what the others told me—"

"Elementary," said the other, looking exasperated. "Get on with it, if you can."

"So I went to this first dump," said Hogan. "And I find a dame out in the back yard, not a stitch on—"

"What!" yelped the captain.

"Taking a sunbath. Pulled a towel over her and called to me to come in . . ."

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. . . "Would you like a gin fizz?" asked the pretty young woman with yellow hair and bronzed body. "I was just longing for someone to come and join me so I wouldn't have to drink alone. Not that I'd mind."

"No, thanks," said Officer Hogan. (This, at least, is the version he reported to the captain.) "I want to ask you about last night. Could you tell me something about Ed Chambers? You knew his wife?"

"Indeed, yes," said the young woman, whose name was Nell Stewart. "Such a charming creature. Oh, dear, I do wish Len would get out of bed and have a drink with me. He's so impossible on Sunday mornings. Now what was it you wanted to know?" she asked brightly.

"You see this Mr. Chambers last night?"

"Why, yes. Of course I did. He did the barbecuing for us."

"What barbecuing?"

"Why, over the gas main, of course. Those pipes out there had a big leak in them—from the houses slipping, you know—and Walter Sullivan—he lives in that other house that's creeping down the hill—said he was going to find it if it killed him, which it almost did. So he took one of Irene's candles—one of her pretty magenta ones—and lit it and went looking for the leak. My goodness!" She sighed. "At first we thought it was an earthquake. There was this geyser of flame, but in a minute it died down and was just a moderate one, and Walter only got singed a little around his eyebrows. So when we couldn't put the fire out we decided to have a barbecue. Not bad. Meat smelled kind of funny, though."

"Look, Mrs. Stewart," said Officer Hogan suspiciously, "this is no laughing matter."

"Indeed, no," she agreed gravely. "The murderer must be brought to book. But after all, the whole bunch of us were there. Except Lucy Chambers, poor darling. She was in bed with one of her sick headaches—always came down with them when Ed wanted to go anywhere, but this time he went anyway."

"But he wasn't there the whole time," Hogan objected. "He claimed he was walkin' the dog—"

"Uh-uh," said Mrs. Stewart. "He just ran home for a minute to see if poor dear Lucy was all right, and that's when he found her."

"He could have shot her then," said Officer Hogan.

"Nope," said Mrs. Stewart. "We would have heard the shot. Besides, the police got there in about ten minutes and said she'd been dead over an hour. See?"

Hogan got it, all right. A trumped-up alibi. They'd all tell the same story. Well, he'd visit the neighbors, get their version of what happened, catch the contradictions, and herd them all down to the station. He'd just got on his feet, anxious to visit the next neighbors,

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when Mr. Stewart came out the door, a tall glass in each hand.

"Ah," he said to his wife, "entertaining already this morning, my pet? Here's your medicine."

She said prettily, taking the drink from him, "This is Officer Hogan, darling. He wants to ask questions about last night. *You* know. Poor Lucy."

"Shoot," said Stewart, sitting down. "Oh—beg pardon. Always start the day off with a *faux pas*. What did you want to know, Officer?"

"What I want to know," said Hogan, "is the circumstance under which you saw Ed Chambers last night."

"Ed Chambers?" said the other in surprise. "Haven't laid eyes on him for a week. Too bad about his wife. Such a sweet little thing, except she always blabbed everything she knew."

"You mean you weren't at this barbecue last night?"

"What barbecue? Nell and I had the Sullivans over for bridge last night, had dinner in the dining-room. Roast beef. Very nice. With Yorkshire pudding."

Hogan fixed the pretty blonde woman with a cold eye. "You perhaps were confused in your dates?" he asked. "The barbecue was some other night?"

"No. Last night."

"You weren't playing bridge?"

Stewart broke in impatiently. "Look, Officer, all you have to do is ask the Sullivans. They live right next door. My God, they couldn't have *had* a barbecue without me!"

"Why not?" asked Officer Hogan.

"Because I'm the only one around here who knows how to cook. Anyway, you ask the Sullivans about the bridge game. I bid a small slam in spades and made seven—or would have, except that Nell revoked. Nearly shot her, but I've mislaid my gun." He sighed. 'There I go again. Sorry."

Hogan could not resist a glance at Mrs. Stewart, but she was gently snoring.

. . . Mrs. Sullivan was on her terrace, painting. She had on shorts, a bandanna around her dark hair, paint all over her bare legs, and a thing on the easel that looked like an inside-out fish.

"Hello," she said absently. "The meter's around in back."

Hogan explained his mission. "If you could oblige," he said, "by just letting me know where you were last night—"

"None of your business," she said sharply. "After all, *I'm* not one of your prime suspects. Or am I?"

He took a deep breath. "No, but Mr. Chambers said he was walking the dog, Mrs. Stewart said he was at a barbecue all of you had, Mr. Stewart said there wasn't any barbecue, that you and your husband were playing bridge over there—"

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Sullivan. "I've never played bridge in my life.

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Horrible waste of time. People shoot each other over it—"

Officer Hogan loosened his collar. "You and your husband were not playing bridge with the Stewarts? Then were you, by any chance, having a barbecue—"

"Barbecue?" she said, looking puzzled. "No. My husband and I went over to the city with the Babsons—they live on the other side of us—had dinner at the Blue Fox, and then went to a movie at the Clay. French. Very decadent."

"This was *last* night?" said Officer Hogan. "You're sure? Not some other night?"

"Certainly I'm sure," she snapped. "Here comes my husband. You can ask him!"

Officer Hogan did. The weary-looking gentleman in the shorts and the baggy eyes said, "Last night? Hell, Officer, we didn't do anything. Not after the day we had. Look." And he sat down heavily. "A day for the birds, that's what it was. Run in and make us a gin fizz, will you, precious?"

She said, "No gin," and put another cigarette in the long holder that protruded from her sullen mouth.

"Make it with whiskey, then." He put his head in his hands. "A day at the beach. Fishing from the pier. We blew out a new tire. We ran out of gas. We left my wallet at home and forgot our bathing suits. Dropped our lunch in the ocean. Caught no fish. We got back home about nine o'clock, had a snort and a snack, and went to bed. The great American way of life! And the next morning," he snarled, "someone like you comes around and starts asking stupid questions. What have we got to do with Ed Chambers and his wife, anyway?"

"No dinner at the Blue Fox last night?" Hogan asked hopefully. "No French movie at the Clay?"

"Look," said the man, baring his teeth, "we had dinner out of a can in our own kitchen and were snoring our heads off by nine thirty. That satisfy you?"

"No," said Officer Hogan and departed.

. . . Mrs. Babson was a charming woman with short reddish curls and a cold in her head. She had on dirty jeans and a torn sweater and was puttering around a rather decrepit garden. She smiled pleasantly at Officer Hogan and said, "Do you know anything about petunias, my good man?"

"No," said Officer Hogan, "I know nothing about nothing." And he explained his errand. "Now. Did you or did you not go over to the city with the Sullivans last night and take in a French movie at the Clay?"

"Mercy, no," said Nancy Babson. "Sounds like an awful waste on a Saturday night. No, we had a barbecue. That's where I got my cold."

Officer Hogan jumped as if he'd been prodded with the devil's pitch-

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fork. *"Barbecue!"* he cried. "Where was it?"

"Why, at the Stewarts', of course," she said as if he should have known it all the time, which he did. She laughed. "Funny darn thing. Walter Sullivan swore he smelled gas from those gas mains out in the street and—"

"Yes, yes?" said Hogan breathlessly. "So he took one of his wife's magenta candles and—"

"Why, how did you *know?"* she said delightedly. "You're simply wonderful."

"And after that Ed Chambers barbecued the meat over the gas main—"

"Ed Chambers? Uh-uh. He doesn't know a steak from a pork chop. No, my husband Dave did the barbecuing."

"But Ed Chambers was there?

"Why, of *course* he was there! He mixed the drinks."

"You were all drunk," said Officer Hogan in despair.

"No," said Mrs. Babson, "we were not. We were never more sober. That's what made it seem so strange when we heard about poor darling Lucy. We could hardly believe that someone had finally shot her."

"Well, I guess that's that," said Hogan, dazed but happy, for now there were two witnesses to the barbecuing, even if their stories didn't exactly jibe; but of course that was all the better—a chink in the armor already. He was about to close his little black book when Mr. Babson appeared in the garden. He looked sober, spruce and jovial.

"Well, well, what's this?" he wanted to know.

Officer Hogan informed him. "So now," he aded, "that we've got it all straightened out about the barbecue—"

"What barbecue?" asked Mr. Babson.

Hogan turned pale and started to quiver inside. "Last night," he faltered. "At the Stewarts'. You know —"

"If there was one there, I didn't know anything about it," said Mr. Babson, who looked like a pillar of the church. "We were over at the Sullivans', playing bridge—"

"Mrs. Sullivan doesn't play bridge," Hogan whispered, his eyes agonized.

"Nonsense, she's won two tournaments in the last month," Babson said coldly, "so she *ought* to know how. Besides, she won six bucks at a twentieth last night which is something of an achievement in itself. I was so damned mad at the six-spade bid I fluffed that I went for a long walk to cool off and ran into Ed Chambers and that damned dog of his wife's. Had a chat with him and cooled off a bit. Nice guy. Not much gumption. Funny thing about his wife. Somebody popped her off."

"Yes," said Officer Hogan faintly. "So I've heard." And he went quietly away.

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The captain said, "Not one story. Six stories. That it? Well, simple enough. We'll bring the whole bunch of them down here and sweat the truth out of them."

"I—I don't think so," Officer Hogan faltered. "Not *these* people."

Officer Hogan was absolutely correct in his surmise. No one sweated anything out of the six witnesses. They were not under oath, since they were not on trial, and their various statements were rife with imagination. They were cajoled, threatened, and browbeaten, to no purpose. Every time the chief pleaded with them to *please* tell him the truth they relented and amiably agreed to do so. They proceeded to change their stories, but not once during the long session of questioning did the six stories coincide.

The only one Captain Fitzmaurice could be sure of was Ed Chambers': he stuck to his non-alibi of walking the dog. He was not, however, indicted, for although he was the most plausible suspect, no motive could be attributed to him, the gun was not found, and—naturally—no witnesses could be unearthed to bear plausible testimony against him.

It was about a year later that Officer Hogan—now back to pounding a beat, since Captain Fitzmaurice naturally needed a fall guy for the Chambers fiasco—found himself in the vicinity of the former barbecue site. The hole in the gas main had been neatly mended and the houses now had more than jacks to support them; but otherwise everything was much the same.

Nell Stewart was the only one at home, and he found her asleep in the nude out in the patio. It took him back.

"Hi," he said, and she pulled a towel over her and drawled, "Come in, darling, whoever you are," without opening her eyes. After a moment she did. "Oh," she said, "hello. It's you again. What do you want now?"

"Just curious," he said, treading on eggs. "Thought maybe you might give me some lowdown on that Chambers case, now that it's officially closed."

Mrs. Stewart was obviously suffering from the effects of the previous evening, so Officer Hogan waited patiently, for once doing the right thing by keeping his mouth shut.

"Can't do any harm now," she murmured thoughtfully. "The murderer is now dead, so I might as well—"

"He is?" said Officer Hogan in astonishment.

"Yep. Legitimately, however—cirrhosis of the liver, and serves him darned well right. So no reason why I shouldn't tell you now. Of course you know that all those stories we handed you were lies—"

"Well, sure," said Officer Hogan. "Of course I know *that*."

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"However," she went on, "there really was a barbecue that night, although we didn't ever give the exact facts about it because none of us had any alibi except each other. So we had to cook up a story that would keep the police from investigating too much. D'you ever know anyone," she demanded truculently, "who could really stand a police investigation as far as his past life was concerned? Well, it wasn't only our past lives, it was our present ones, and when we found out that one of *us* had popped her off we had to present a disunited front."

"But you knew who did it?" Officer Hogan was almost breathless.

"Sure. It was obvious. Only one of us knew how to cook, and when he disappeared for a long period we just had to go hungry until he got back. He was the only one who was missing that night at any time."

"D'you know why he killed her?"

"Ye-up. He was carrying on with her something fierce, but her guilt feelings finally got the better of her and her psychiatrist told her she'd never get rid of her headaches until she confessed all. So when she told the guy she was going to spill it to her husband he got panicky on account of he owed Ed Chambers a lot of money and was afraid of the consequences. So-o-o—" She yawned, sighed wistfully. "God, but I need a drink. Where was I? Oh. Well, the guy naturally had a key to Lucy's house, and when he saw that all of us were busy with our drinks—of course Ed Chambers never walked that damn poodle; that was just another of our stories—he sneaked in and shot the dear little dame right smack dead. Poor thing."

"But who—who—" Officer Hogan was sweating with eagerness now.

The door opened and a man came out, a glass in each hand. "You've met my husband, haven't you?" she asked Officer Hogan in her pretty way.

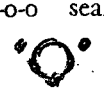
"Sure, but—but—but that's Ed Chambers! What happened to—"

"To poor dear Len?" said the former Mrs. Stewart. "Oh, he died a little while ago. Cirrhosis of the liver, as I told you."

Officer Hogan finally got it. "Cirrhosis of the liver," he said. "The murderer—your husband—" He was just leaving, his shoulders bowed, when he suddenly thought of something and turned back. "The gun?" he whispered, and he seemed almost afraid to listen to the answer.

The former Mrs. Stewart took a dainty sip of her drink.

"Cached in the hole of the gas main," she said at last. "Now sealed forever."



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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THEODORE MATHIESON**

TITLE: ***Florence Nightingale, Detective***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALES: England and France

TIME: 1854

COMMENTS: *In which that famous "lady with the lamp" solves a murder to make sure her gallant and courageous band of nurses and nuns reaches the wounded in Crimea without delay . . .*

ON A BRISK OCTOBER EVENING IN 1854, Florence Nightingale waved good-bye to her family as her train pulled out of the lamp-lit London Bridge Station. Tears filled her eyes, but she closed the window with a deliberate bang, as if she were sealing off a compartment in her life.

"God help us all to get to the Crimea safely," she prayed inwardly.

Then, finding the coach cold and draughty, she opened her brown leather valise to bring out a shawl for her shoulders and paused, her hand half-way into the open bag.

In the center of a folded gray uniform lay a multilated crown-piece, and she picked it up, frowning. Across the embossed young face of Queen Victoria ran a deep ragged *X*, scraped viciously into the silver by some sharp tool.

Where had the coin come from? It was not hers, but her valise had lain upon the coach seat while she was supervising the entraining of thirty-eight nurses and nuns. Perhaps one of her four companions in the coach had dropped it in. But *why?* She looked quickly around, the coin concealed in her hand.

Next to Florence sat her friend Charles Bracebridge, a middle-aged clergyman, clutching in his lap the metal money box that contained all their cash for the trip.

Opposite, Selina Bracebridge—the pretty wife of the clergyman and Florence's dear friend—was

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already absorbed in her knitting.

Next to Selina sat Roger Pemberton, the young good-looking courier from the office of the Secretary at War, who would accompany Florence as far as Marseilles. He had taken papers from his pocket, obviously written orders from his superior, and was conscientiously studying them.

By the far window Mrs. Partridge, a sturdy, middle-aged Amazon engaged as mistress-of-supplies, was readjusting her black cape and bonnet.

Florence decided she was too tired to wonder about the coin, and slipping it into her purse, she closed her eyes. Except for the few hours she had slept, this was the first time in a week that her hands had not been busy. Things had happened so fast! Just seven days ago, the *Times* had reported shocking news. British soldiers were dying by thousands in the Crimea because of inadequate hospital care; there were not sufficient surgeons, no dressers or nurses, not even linen to make bandages! Their allies the French were doing much better, the *Times* had reported—the French had their Sisters of Charity. Even the enemy, the Russians, cared adequately for their wounded. The British public had been instantly aroused. "The *French* are more adequately prepared than *we?*"

For Florence the news had come like a call from Above. She had been managing a nursing home in London, and now she went at once to the home of her close friend, the Secretary at War, and volunteered her services.

"Let me take my nurses to the front!" she said to him. "We can help the soldiers there, as well as the nurses here at home! You know what a low position the public nurse holds in England. She is regarded as little better than a woman of the streets! But if I am able to take to Scutari a staff of well-disciplined English nurses, and they do their job well, then the position of the English nurse will at once become respectable and secure!"

The Secretary at War had looked shrewdly at the woman before him. Florence at thirty-four was still remarkably girlish-looking, with a slight and willowy figure; her luxuriant brown hair, parted in the middle, was drawn down almost to her cheekbones; her face was tenderly oval, and her gray eyes dancingly youthful. But Florence, whom he had known as a young girl, had grown to be a woman of strong character with the gift of firm decision; she was like a delicately-wrought scabbard that held a strong, true blade.

"Yes, the nation needs your help, Flo," he had said. "I have already discussed with my constituents the possibility of calling upon you, and they have agreed they are ready to give you plenary powers. By all

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means make your preparations at once. I pray to God your experiment will be a success—for the sake of the nation as well as for your nurses."

Now the train whistled—the little squeak of English engines—and Florence opened her eyes to find that the twilight beyond the coach windows had turned to night. By the faint light of the lamp she saw Bracebridge nodding, still holding the money box protectively in his lap . . .

The following morning, as the steam packet landed at the Boulogne quai, brightly dressed fisherwomen greeted the party with welcoming cries. They seized the nurses' boxes and bags and carried them along the cobbled street to the hotel.

There Florence opened her purse before she realized that she had no French currency to give them. On impulse she seized the scarred crown-piece and held it out to the big fisherwoman who had carried her luggage.

"Non, non," the woman cried, backing away. *"Vive les soeurs!"*

At the same moment Florence heard a gasp at her side and saw the courier Pemberton staring down at the coin in her outstretched palm.

"Where did you get that?" he asked sharply.

"I found it in my valise last evening. I think someone dropped it there, perhaps as a jest. Was it you?"

"No, no, not I. But I fear, dear Miss Nightingale, it was no jest. It means trouble!" And with that Pemberton walked into the hotel.

"Now what does he mean by that?" Flo asked Selina Bracebridge as the other joined her.

"You're being admired, Flo!" Selina said, nodding towards the entrance of the hotel where a tall, well-dressed young Englishman stood regarding the nurse with an appreciative eye. When he saw the two women looking at him, he came over at once.

"Pardon, Miss Nightingale," he said. "I am Percy Leigh-Duff. I believe you will leave Marseilles on the *Vectis* on the twenty-seventh?"

"Yes," Florence said, with a trace of impatience. The affectation of the young man's adornment annoyed her. A scarf of figured silk rose high on his neck, held in place by a pin set with a pearl the size of a half-sovereign, and upon the middle finger of his left hand he wore a large, diamond-shaped onyx ring with a pearl in the center.

"Then I will be your travelling companion," Leigh-Duff said. "I, too, am going to the Crimea to observe the—ah—hostilities."

Florence had heard of men like Leigh-Duff—T.G.'s, they were called, Travelling Gentlemen—who sat on the fringes of the battlefield watching the struggle as they would a game of cricket. Flor-

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ence stiffened with disapproval, and her voice was cool.

"Perhaps you could come help us roll bandages, Mr. Leigh-Duff. We could use your help."

"I should be most charmed," Leigh-Duff said, bowing.

Florence nodded curtly and, taking Selina Bracebridge's arm, piloted her into the hotel.

"Travelling Gentleman!" Florence snapped.

"He may be a traveller, but he's no gentleman!" Selina said. "Didn't you recognize him?"

"I am pleased to say I did not."

"Very wealthy, very profligate, and completely without conscience. Three years ago he was engaged to a young girl—Delia Townsend, daughter of a baronet. At the last moment he learned that she was also the daughter of the baronet's Italian mistress—and threw her over!"

"He *looks* like a cad," Florence sniffed.

"But the poor girl! The shock drove her to suicide. She'd already been rejected by the baronet's family and friends; she jumped into the surf at Margate and was swept out to sea. The baronet threatened to kill Leigh-Duff, but unfortunately never did, although there was a young man unrequitedly in love with Delia who followed Leigh-Duff to France and shot at him once in the street. After that, nobody heard any more about it."

Florence left Selina then, to supervise the seating of her nurses and nuns in the dining room of the hotel. When she finished her task, she rejoined her friend at a table where Charles Bracebridge and Roger Pemberton were also seated.

"Now then, Mr. Pemberton," she said, laying the mutilated coin down upon the napery. "Suppose you tell me why the sight of this coin means trouble."

"Have you not heard of the Iconoclast, Miss Nightingale?" Pemberton asked incredulously.

"Never."

"But his exploits have been appearing in all the London papers for the past twelvemonth!"

"I have been quite busy at the institute—too busy to concern myself with journalistic ephemera. What is this . . . Iconoclast?"

"A criminal. He steals, and leaves these ruined crown pieces behind him as a kind of signature. But he is no common thief!"

"I do not understand the distinction," Florence said.

"A common thief robs for a living. But the Iconoclast does not seem to care about the *amount*. He seems rather more concerned with the *circumstances* under which he does the stealing. For instance, last Maundy Thursday, just before the alms-giving ceremony was to begin—in spite of the presence of the guards at Buckingham Palace—the Iconoclast stole the Maundy money box right out from under the noses of the officials!"

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Charles Bracebridge put his hands under the table to hold the money box more tightly.

"An impudent thief!" Florence cried. The idea seemed to delight more than to frighten her.

"More than that, Miss Nightingale," Pemberton continued with some heat. "He seems intent upon making his depredations under the most sacrilegious circumstances. He has stolen a chalice from the altar of St. James. Once, disguised as a clock-room attendant, he stole a necklace of trifling value from one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting at the opera. Whatever we English hold dear and sacred, the Iconoclast flouts by making a petty theft. The *Times* is offering a five hundred pound reward for him!"

"But why should he put his coin in my valise?" Florence asked.

"Don't you really know?" Pemberton asked skeptically. "You and your nurses are an inspiration to all of Britain. The people regard your mission as a sacred one!"

Suddenly Florence became aware that she was being closely watched by a man at a table near the big arched entrance. He was young, heavy-shouldered, with raven-black hair and handsome but predatorily curved features. She looked coolly across at him, and he rose and strode quickly out of the dining room.

"Who is that man?" she asked.

"That's Will Manders of the *London Journal*," Charles Bracebridge said. "He's going to Sebastopol."

"Why, he spoke to us on the ship," Selina purred. "A very attractive gentleman. Most interested in you, Flo. He asked all sorts of questions about your plans."

"Why didn't he interrogate me directly?" Florence demanded.

"Well, to tell the truth," Selina said reluctantly, "he did say he found you a little . . . intimidating!"

Florence Nightingale and her company arrived at the Gard du Nord, Paris, at ten that evening, and by eleven were comfortably lodged at the Metropole. For a while it looked as if not enough rooms had been reserved to accommodate the party, but at the last moment the newspaperman, Will Manders, came to the rescue.

"I have a room reserved, Miss Nightingale," he said with a smile, as she stood before the desk clerk. "Please take it to put your people in."

"But where shall you sleep, Mr. Manders?"

"Ah, you know my name. I am pleased. I won't mind spending one night in the lobby."

"Thank you, Mr. Manders," Florence said. "My ladies are wearied by the trip from Boulogne. I shall tell them whom to thank."

She spoke gratefully, but she mistrusted the self-satisfied gleam in the reporter's dark eyes. Manders

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bowed and retired to a hotel sofa.

The T.G., Leigh-Duff, had stood by without making a similar offer, and his supercilious expression told Florence at once that he was repaying her for putting him in his place. He spoke up now.

"You friend is not likely to lose his money box now, is he?" He nodded languidly at Bracebridge, who had cautiously strapped the box to his arm.

"Mr. Bracebridge is a respected clergyman," Florence replied sharply. "In the company of some people, he is thoroughly justified in taking such precautions."

Leigh-Duff reddened.

"I would not look in the street, Miss Nightingale, for what might lie in your pocket!" he said cryptically, and then walked away.

"*Isn't* he an unpleasant man!" Selina Bracebridge said.

But Florence was already whispering to Charles Bracebridge that he might leave the box with the clerk to put in the hotel safe, which the clergyman did with great relief . . .

Florence awoke suddenly in her hotel room in the middle of the night and lay in the dark listening to her heart pounding fast. What had disturbed her?

Close by she could hear the quiet breathing of Selina, Mother Bermondsey, leader of the Bermondsey nuns, and Mrs. Partridge, with whom she shared her room.

Then almost gradually she became aware of another sound—a kind of subdued rubbing and scratching. She sat up to listen. It was coming from the other side of the door to the hotel corridor. Presently it stopped, and there was a silence, followed by a heavy thump.

Florence sprang out of her bed just as the sequel came—the creak of footsteps fading rapidly down the corridor.

"Wait, Miss Nightingale," someone whispered, and Mrs. Partridge's heavy figure rose from her bed. "I heard it too, Miss. You'd better let me do the looking."

Selina Bracebridge and Mother Bermondsey stirred but did not awaken.

Both women put on robes and slippers, and then Mrs. Partridge, looking like a stout bear, crept to the door and unlocked it. She opened it cautiously and looked out, then gasped.

"Stay there, my dearie," she whispered, and slid out into the corridor. A moment later she was back.

"There's a dead man lying out there in front of the door, with a knife in his back!"

"Who is he?"

"I don't know, but he looks familiar."

Florence, who had lit a lamp, went to the door and opened it. The man lying on his side facing them was Percy Leigh-Duff. He was wearing a dressing-gown of

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maroon velvet, and from his back protruded a copper-handled knife.

Florence seized the doorknob in astonishment, and looking down saw something newly scratched upon the mahogany panel of the door—a circle with a cross in the middle. *The symbol of the defaced crown-piece!*

"The Iconoclast!" she whispered. "Quickly, Mrs. Partridge, let's pull him into the room!"

Mrs. Partridge choked and faltered; then, recovering, she put her hands under the dead man's arms and dragged him across the threshhold. Florence quickly closed the door. Selina and Mother Bermondsey were awake now, sitting up in bed, watching wide-eyed.

"What has happened, Florence?" the Sister asked.

"The Iconoclast has killed this man and laid him before our door. He left his mark on the panel—I heard him scratching it, and I heard him run away!"

"The Iconoclast *here?*" Selina said in an unsteady voice. "But why should he do that!"

"I don't know," Florence said, "unless he wants to stop our party! But that he shall not have a chance to do. We shall return Mr. Leigh-Duff to his own room and wash our hands of the whole affair. Come along, Mrs. Partridge. Mr. Leigh-Duff had room six-eleven, just down the hall."

"But, Flo, do you think it is *right?*" Selina protested.

"Would it be right to keep the men at the hospital in Scutari waiting for us, perhaps to fail them altogether? We cannot risk delay! Will you please help me, Mrs. Partridge?"

"Of course I will, Miss."

Florence and the supply mistress carried the dead man down the hall, and not until they arrived at Room 611 did Florence realize that the door might be locked and they might have to trundle their dreadful burden back to her own room. But the door was slightly ajar, and they entered quickly. A lamp was lit by the bedside, and the covers were thrown back. Evidently Leigh-Duff had been in bed when his visitor—his murderer—called.

As they laid the dead man carefully upon the bed, Florence's attention was drawn to Duff's left hand, which was coated with dried blood, and showed upon the middle finger a band of clean, clear flesh where he had worn the onyx ring.

"The Iconoclast killed him, then robbed him," she said in disgust. "He must have the unfeeling soul of a devil!"

As the train chugged its way south through the valley of the Loire, Florence looked out at the pastoral scenery and wondered if the police had yet found the body of Percy Leigh-Duff.

The night before, after returning

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from the T.G.'s room, she had rubbed colored shoe wax upon the raw scratch defacing the door panel, which made the symbol almost invisible, and while she was doing it the young courier, Roger Pemberton, fully dressed, passed her in the hall without a word, as if she were doing the most natural thing in the world.

Why hadn't Pemberton spoken? Was he too shocked to find her there? Did he have his mind set upon personal matters?

When the train arrived at Lyons, half-way to Marseilles, Florence got off upon the platform to exercise, and had not been strolling thirty seconds before she was joined by William Manders, his dark face looking sallow in the sunlight, with blue rings beneath his eyes.

"I trust you were not too inconvenienced last evening, Mr. Manders?" she said.

"Not at all. I had a most interesting time."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I watched your little game with great pleasure, Miss Nightingale."

His tone chilled Florence. She did not reply but stared coolly at the reporter.

"I suppose playing hide-and-seek with poor Leigh-Duff's body would be considered good practice —for a nurse."

"You are crude and impertinent, Mr. Manders," Florence said coldly. "Moreover, by not reporting what you saw to the police, you put yourself in an equally equivocal position."

"I realize that," he said quickly. "But I stand to gain more by keeping your secret. You see, I am not going to the Crimea to report on the war. The *Journal* has sent me on the trail of the Iconoclast!"

"Indeed," Florence said noncommittally.

"I told my editor that the devil might strike at your party and I was right. Pemberton told me about your finding the coin in your valise, and I saw the mark upon your door. Now we know the Iconoclast will even murder to achieve his purpose, which seems to be to humiliate the English public. A very single-minded individual!"

"One who must thoroughly hate us," Florence agreed, thawing. "Have you thought what kind of person he must be?"

"Yes, indeed!" Manders nodded thoughtfully. "A young man—vigorous, to get in and out of the places he's been—with a brilliant but perverse intelligence, to plan the things he's done."

"Perhaps well-born, well-educated," Florence added. "Have you also pondered upon what must have caused this strange disease of his mind?"

"On that I cannot speculate."

"I think I can."

"Please tell me."

"Another time," she said hastily. "I see Mother Bermondsey needs

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my help, and there goes the warning whistle! Excuse me, Mr. Manders!"

And Florence ran quickly down the platform.

The Iconoclast struck again in Marseilles.

For two days Florence had been foresightedly busy, buying medical and other supplies. In her hotel room at La Cadiere, the windows of which looked far out upon the sunny Mediterranean, she interviewed the merchants and dealers who supplied her with foods, beds, hospital equipment—and alcohol.

On the last evening but one before the *Vectis* was to sail, Florence sat wearily in her room alone, surrounded by sample items of goods piled helter-skelter about her. Blankets of proper weight and size, tin drinking cups that were a little thin but easily portable, pails for tea, tall Garraty lamps whose handles got too hot to touch soon after lighting but which were bought because of their broad wick and bright light, plates, knives, forks, and a hundred other items.

Suddenly there came a knock at the door, and at her reply, one of the professional nurses entered. It was Mrs. Grimes, elderly, stout, weighing at least fourteen stone, and with a red, veined nose that bespoke frequent tippling.

"I have something to show you, Miss. Would you come with me?"

Florence curiously followed Mrs. Grimes down the corridor to the suite which had been assigned to the nurses. Eight or nine of the elderly women in their shapeless gray tweed dresses were standing or sitting about in stiff, strangely silent attitudes.

In the center of the room stood a fair-sized wooden crate, unopened. Mrs. Grimes pointed at it.

"That arrived about a half hour ago, Miss. There are a dozen large bottles of brandy in it."

"Who sent it?" Florence demanded.

"A boy of the streets brought it. He said a young man stopped him, gave him some money, and told him to pick up the crate in the alley behind the hotel and bring it to this room by the back stairs."

"A young man," Florence said sharply. "Did you ask the boy for a description?"

"No, Miss," Mrs. Grimes said abashed. "There didn't seem at the time to be any reason to."

Florence walked over to the crate. "And you didn't open it?"

Mrs. Grimes looked embarrassed, and her glance slid briefly around at the others. "Well, we wanted to show our appreciation to you, Miss. We've never had so much care taken of our comforts before, and we felt it was the least we could do —well, hold back—sort of."

"Thank you, Mrs. Grimes," Florence said quietly. "Thank all of you."

Florence shuddered as she

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thought of what might have happened to her expedition if drunken nurses had gone careening about the streets of Marseilles.

Suddenly she leaned over the crate with a cry of dismay and pointed to a small cardboard tag that had been affixed at one end.

"Good heavens," she cried, *"that box of brandy is from our own store of supplies!* Most of what I ordered was sent at once to the warehouse at the dock, but the food and alcoholic beverages were brought here to the hotel and stored in the basement until the ship arrived! Mrs. Partridge is in charge of the inventory. She would never leave the storeroom unlocked for someone to burglarize! Come with me, Mrs. Grimes—we must go down there at once!"

The back stairs were dark and steep, but it was only a minute or two before Florence and Mrs. Grimes hastened towards the glass-paneled storeroom door which stood at the end of a draughty, brick-floored corridor. A light burned inside, but Florence did not bother to knock. She threw the door open and saw at once that her worst fears had been realized.

At a small table opposite them, upon which stood a brightly glowing Garraty lamp, sat Mrs. Partridge, her head drooped forward, and there was bright red blood upon the tabletop.

"Mrs. Partridge!" Florence cried, hastening at once to the side of the supply mistress. By the light of the lamp, which Florence held high, she saw that the woman had been struck just above the temple by a sharp-edged object. She found the weapon a moment later—a paperweight that lay upon the floor a few feet away. She could not rouse Mrs. Partridge, but the woman was breathing.

"Go fetch three or four of the others," she said to Mrs. Grimes, who was stepping nervously about clucking her tongue, "and put Mrs. Partridge to bed in my room."

"Yes, Miss!" The nurse fluttered heavily to the door and turned. "Who has done this dreadful thing?"

"A murderous young man who calls himself the Iconoclast," Florence said. "We must be on the watch for him!"

An hour later Mrs. Partridge lay fully conscious upon Florence's bed. Florence had forbidden her to speak, and Mrs. Grimes stood by with a glass of brandy in case the supply mistress should feel faint.

Meanwhile, Florence had quietly sent for other members of her party —Charles and Selina Bracebridge and Mother Bermondsey, as well as Roger Pemberton and Will Manders.

As Florence explained what happened, the young courier reddened self-consciously and plucked his nether lip while Manders remained cool, aloof, and faintly mocking.

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Bracebridge had the money box strapped to his arm again—he refused to leave the box with the hotel clerk, whose looks, he said, he did not trust—and Selina, with her lips tightly pursed, clicked busily with her knitting needles.

At a smile from Florence, Mrs. Partridge, who was all too ready to begin, overflowed with the details of her story.

After supper, she said, she went down to the cellar and began working at her inventory lists. An hour later, when her eyes started feeling strained, she stopped to rest them. She looked up and saw a man standing in the doorway. He had a handkerchief over his face and a gun in his hand, and she didn't dare scream. He came towards her, calmly took up the paperweight, and struck her with it. That was the last thing she remembered, until she awoke in Miss Nightingale's room.

"Didn't you notice anything about him—anything that would help to identify him?" Florence asked.

"The lamp light was in my eyes, and they were fuzzy from working. No, I didn't see him plainly."

"He didn't speak?"

"Not a word."

"You didn't notice the color of his hair or—?"

Mrs. Partridge wrung her hands.

"Was he tall or short?"

"Well, now," the supply mistress said eagerly, "he was as tall as Mr. Pemberton—about—or even Mr. Manders, but *much* taller than Mr. Bracebridge!"

When the others had gone and Florence was alone again, she walked restlessly up and down in front of her windows. Far out on the Mediterranean she saw the flare of a rocket rise suddenly into the night from some ship in distress. She, too, felt like showing distress signals, but to whom to appeal? She had only herself to rely upon.

Already the Iconoclast had struck twice and had been foiled. She felt his enraged frustration almost as if it were her own! To-morrow was her last night in Marseilles—the following morning, Friday the 27th, the *Vectis* would leave for Constantinople. She was sure he would try again. But when? How?

Suddenly Florence stopped her pacing. A spark, an insight had gleamed momentarily, a glimmer of the truth; and then the gleam vanished. Perhaps if she went to sleep now, in the morning the inspiration would come clearly to her mind. She had solved many other problems in this manner, why not this one?

She retired at once, but not before she had carefully locked the door and placed a chair beneath the knob.

She awoke unenlightened. In heavy spirits she descended to the dining room and had her breakfast,

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then went up to the hotel clerk to ask for her mail.

The clerk bowed respectfully and said, "Ah, Mademoiselle Nightingale. I was about to send a *garçon* up to you with the news! A gentleman is heer to see you—Monsieur Bourget of the Parisian Police!"

Numb with shock, but keeping her outward composure, Florence turned to look into the shrewd brown eyes of a small, black-bearded man who removed his hat punctiliously.

"It is an honor to meet you, Mademoiselle. If I may have a few words with you?"

"We will go out on the terrace," Florence said, and led the way.

They sat down together at a marble-topped table in the shade of a tall palm tree, and the Frenchman looked delicately around the garden, which at this early hour was deserted.

"It is not my purpose to embarrass you, Mademoiselle," he said deferentially, "but I wonder if you know why I have followed you here from Paris?"

"Yes. It is about Mr. Percy Leigh-Duff, is it not?"

"Precisely."

Without hesitation, Florence told him what had happened; and when she finished. M. Bourget nodded politely.

"The Prefect assumed this might have been the case, but he sent me to inquire. We are not interested in putting obstacles in your way, Mademoiselle. It would be internationally—shall we say—unpopular? But we could not overlook the fact that there was a trail of bloodstains which led to the door of your room, and that curious circle marked upon the panel. So that is the mark of your Iconoclast!" The Frenchman's dark eyes glittered with an expression Florence could not read. "I have heard of him. And you think he murdered the Englishman in an attempt to delay your party—"

"No, no, *not for that reason!*" Florence cried, and was surprised at herself. It was the first time she had put her doubt into words. "What I mean is—the Iconoclast has always succeeded in harassing the English by petty humiliations, by trifling thefts. Just yesterday—"

Florence told Bourget of the sending of the brandy to her nurses.

"You see, Monsieur Bourget, the murder does not fit into the Iconoclast's pattern. I find it inconsistent, as if I had diagnosed a case of common measles and then turned around to find the patient dead of diphtheria!"

"But you do think it was the Iconoclast who murdered Mr. Leigh-Duff?"

"I do. It's unlikely that anyone else would be perverse enough to leave poor Leigh-Duff at our door in order to stop our party, but I believe that this was done as an *afterthought*. The murder was originally committed for a totally different reason!"

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"Now what reason could it be?" M. Bourget asked softly, and took out a leather cigar case. "Do you mind if I smoke, Mademoiselle?"

Florence shook her head and watched M. Bourget as he ceremoniously bit the end off the cigar, then lit it, puffing with satisfaction until the end glowed red.

"Monsieur Bourget!" Florence cried suddenly, her face transformed with light and hope. Now she had hold of the thought that had eluded her last night! "Did Mr. Leigh-Duff die at once?"

"Strange you should ask that." Bourget shot Florence a penetrating glance. "There was internal as well as external bleeding which the entrance of the blade did not account for. We assumed that he must have struggled much *after* he was stabbed."

"And had he been robbed?"

"No. He carried a hundred pounds in bank-notes."

"And did you find an onyx ring with a pearl set in the center?"

"No, and I searched the bedroom myself."

Florence clapped her hands triumphantly.

"Monsieur Bourget, I think I know who murdered Percy Leigh-Duff! I also think the Iconoclast will try once more to humiliate our undertaking by a petty theft!"

"Name him," Bourget said grimly, "and we shall get the truth out of him!"

"No. The Iconoclast is very clever. It would take days to find out from London, and —I must leave tomorrow morning. No, you must give me a chance to set a trap."

"You must not endanger yourself, Mademoiselle. That will not be permitted!"

"I believe there will be little danger."

"You cannot be sure!"

"I must take the risk, then, and you will be there to protect me."

At that moment Selina and Charles Bracebridge came out upon the terrace; the money box was strapped to the clergyman's arm.

"Charles!" Florence called. The two came over at once, and after introducing them to M. Bourget, Florence said, "Charles, give the money box to me. I will take care of it from now until the ship sails."

The clergyman frowned.

"But you've got so many other tasks, Flo, that you shouldn't be bothered. Don't you trust me?"

"Of course I do, Charles, but all the same I'll take the box," Florence said firmly. "And I want you to be sure to tell everyone in our party that it is in my care until we leave. Including Mr. Manders and Mr. Pemberton . . .

M. Bourget, Florence Nightingale, and Mother Bermondsey sat in the darkness of Florence's bedroom and waited. Through the half-open window opposite them came the sounds of carriages upon the street, the voluble French of

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a nocturnal hawker, and the soothing wash of the surf. The bells of a near-by church chimed ten o'clock. Florence's windows had been dark for an hour.

Mother Bermondsey rustled wearily in her dark habit and Florence put an affectionate hand upon the Sister's arm. "It will soon be over, dear Sister," she whispered.

Bourget spoke up huskily.

"I think it would have been simpler and safer just to give me his name."

"Sh-h-h!" Florence warned. *"Here comes the Iconoclast now!"*

Along the balcony outside the window had appeared a silent figure, black against the star-lit night. He paused momentarily at the open window, lowered his face to the aperture to listen; then assuredly and silently he raised the window higher and stepped inside.

Bourget waited another second or two, until he heard the faint thump of furniture, the tinkling of glass lamp pendants, then he called sharply, 'Stand where you are! If you move I will shoot. Strike a light, Miss Nightingale!"

Instantly there followed a scuffle, and the figure ran ducking towards the window. Bourget stepped quickly forward, raised the butt of his gun, and brought it down upon the intruder's head. The Iconoclast collapsed with a groan upon the floor.

Florence then lighted a lamp and all three of them crowded around the prostrate and unconscious figure. It was that of a young man, squarely and heavily built, with a full plump face and black, short-cropped hair. A trickle of blood ran over his forehead, and Florence knelt over to examine the wound.

"It's strange," said Mother Bermondsey, "his face looks familiar."

The young man opened his eyes then, and looked up at Florence with contempt.

"Come on, young fellow," Bourget said, lifting him roughly to his feet. "You've got a lot of charges to answer to!"

Then Bourget let go of the young man's arm in sudden astonishment, and backing away, brought up his gun in a kind of instinctive defense.

"It's not a man—it's a *woman!*"

"Yes, of course," Florence Nightingale said quietly. "She is, I believe, the baronet's missing daughter who threw herself into the sea after Leigh-Duff jilted her. She was just the kind I imagined who would be the Iconoclast—a vigorous hater of the English. An athletic, sports-loving young person, born of an Italian mother, who was spurned and rejected by her father's English wife and family and friends, and who grew to hate English life and ways. When Leigh-Duff threw her over, it must have been the last straw, and she determined to humiliate the country that had scorned her."

"You're quite correct, you know, Miss Nightingale," the woman said

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harshly. "You English would have none of me!"

"Even her voice sounds familiar," Mother Bermondsey said.

"Yes, of course it is. And so is her face," Florence replied. "But without a grey wig she's scarcely recognizable as our roommate in the Paris hotel. Are you, *Mrs. Partridge?*"

Florence was so busy the following morning with the rush of serious business that preceded the sailing of the *Vectis* that she would not speak to anyone of the events of the previous night. Preparations for their work at Scutari came first, and it was not until nearly noon, when Florence sat at last in a deck chair upon the stern of the mail packet, watching the wake of the vessel upon the sea, that her friends gathered around her and demanded an explanation.

"When did you first think of Mrs. Partridge as the Iconoclast?" Selina asked.

"When I found out she lied about her attack, which I realized just as Monsieur Bourget lit his cigar on the terrace yesterday morning. The red tip of his cigar made me think of the Garraty lamp. As you know, the handle heats up within a very short time, so that it becomes too hot to touch. Mrs. Partridge—we'll call her that—said she had been writing for an hour, but in that time the handle would have scorched the fingers of anyone who touched it. And yet I picked it up to examine her wound without being burned! That meant she was lying—but *why?*

"The moment I suspected her truthfulness, the whole picture unfolded. Selina had told me the story of the baronet's daughter whom Leigh-Duff had jilted—the girl who had walked into the sea. Why couldn't that girl be still alive? I thought. Why couldn't she be the Iconoclast—*and be Mrs. Partridge as well?* Remember, the Iconoclast had already appeared as a woman at the opera when she played the part of a cloak-room attendant!

"Doubtless Leigh-Duff recognized her and guessed she was the Iconoclast. He told us that himself when he stood at the hotel desk in Paris and said, 'Don't look in the street for what might lie in your pocket.' He meant that the Iconoclast was *one of our own party!*"

"But he made a mistake. He let Mrs. Partridge know that he had recognized her, and she felt it imperative to kill him. She must have left our hotel room while we were asleep, called upon Leigh-Duff in his room, and stabbed him with the copper-handled knife.

But he didn't die at once. Monsieur Bourget told me that internal bleeding indicated a struggle after he had been stabbed. But there are other kinds of exertion besides struggling. I could see him dragging himself down the hall to our door in order to scratch the sign of

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the Iconoclast upon the panel himself! Not to warn us, I think, but to avenge himself upon the murderess by indicating that she was within.

"When Mrs. Partridge stepped outside the door, she saw the mark and understood his intent. She saw too that *Leigh-Duff had scratched the symbol with the edge of his diamond-shaped onyx ring!* So she removed the ring from his finger—to make us think that it was the Iconoclast who had deliberately put Leigh-Duff there and scratched his own signature on the door.

"For, you see, I knew that the ring was not taken when Leigh-Duff was first stabbed! I remembered the band of clean flesh where the ring had been upon his blood-stained finger, and I realized that if the ring had been taken at once, in Leigh-Duff's room, the band of flesh on the ring finger would surely have been smeared. The ring, then, was taken later, after the blood had dried—in other words, after Leigh-Duff crawled the length of the hall.

"Besides, Monsieur Bourget told me Leigh-Duff was not robbed; his pocketbook with a hundred pounds in it was found upon him, so the ring must have been taken later—*and for a special reason*. Namely, so we would not know that Duff himself had used it to scratch his dying message—and who else would have that reason but Mrs. Partridge?"

"But the footsteps you heard, Flo!" Selina Bracebridge asked.

"Mr. Manders saw Mrs. Partridge and me when we moved the body. It was quite possible he saw the body before Mrs. Patridge opened the door, and it was his footsteps I heard."

"They were," Manders said ruefully, "although Leigh-Duff was already dead when I saw him. I watched Mrs. Partridge bend over the body, too, but I did not see her take the ring."

"But who attacked Mrs. Partridge in the basement of the hotel?" Charles Bracebridge asked.

"She struck herself and then feigned unconsciousness. She had hoped to humiliate us by getting our nurses intoxicated, but when that ruse failed, she realized that she must stay on longer as Mrs. Partridge to accomplish her end, and so she play-acted. Only the Garraty lamp drew my attention to her lie, and all the rest followed."

Mother Bermondsey held up the lamp.

"And here it is, Florence," she said. "I went down into the basement of the hotel and took charge of it personally as you asked me to. And I have put a pad upon the handle so you won't scorch your hands."

Florence took the lamp into her hands and gazed at it affectionately.

"It lighted our way out of darkness," she said. "I shall use this lamp, and only this lamp, whenever I visit my sick."

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Can this keep up? We fervently hope so! Five "first stories" in five consecutive issues of EQMM! Beginners everywhere, hear the call: if you think you have writing talent, we want to encourage you to channel it into the field of the mystery-crime-detective short story. Keep knocking at our editorial door—it is never locked to a newcomer—never!

Tom Robertson was born in Arizona and grew up there. He served in the U.S. Army for two years, most of the time in Italy. His "first story" is lean and muscular, befitting its background of a golf course. It is also a story so fair to the reader that if you have any doubts on finishing it, we suggest that you read it again and be convinced.

TEE SHOT

by TOM ROBERTSON

GRAYBOW SANK HIS PUTT FOR A bogey, stooped, and got his golf ball out of the cup. Then he shouldered his clubs and we walked down off the green. We stopped in the shade and leaned our matching golf bags against the soft-drink machine and Graybow dropped two coins into the slot.

It was stifling. As I wiped my face and neck with an already soggy handkerchief, I could feel Graybow looking at me and getting ready to say something, and I got that chilled feeling of dread, just as I'd had every time he'd opened his mouth for the past two weeks.

I emptied the Coca Cola bottle and looked past the next tee at the long fairway that curved up to the right at the end of a grove of oak trees. There wasn't anyone else in sight. I could still feel Graybow's eyes on me. I knew it was coming, this time.

"Harry," he said, and his voice sounded strange to me.

I coughed.

"Harry," Graybow said again. "We've been playing golf together for a long time . . ."

I slid the empty bottle into the rack by the vending machine. "That's right," I said without looking at him. "Almost twelve years."

"And we've been partners for half that time."

"I guess about that long," I said.

"And there's something funny, Harry—look at me, Harry."

I looked up at his sweating face, with the thin, slightly puckering scar that went from the corner of his right eye halfway down the cheek. His pale eyes had deep lines

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around them from squinting against the sun on construction jobs and golf courses. I tried to stare directly into the eyes, then gave up and looked at a spot between them.

"Sure, 'Bow," I said. "What is it?"

"Embezzlement," he said, and stopped. "Embezzlement is a nasty word. Especially when it concerns a partner."

So there it was. But it had jolted me, even though I had felt it coming, and I could tell by watching him that the jolt showed in my face.

"Lorene says there's either a hell of a shortage or a hell of an error in her books." The pale eyes looked at me steadily. Very slowly I reached into my pocket, got out a cigarette, and lit it.

"When we get back downtown I'm going to call Abe Joseph in to start an audit."

"Okay, 'Bow," I said. My voice sounded as if it belonged to somebody else. "Whatever you say."

"And I want both of us to be there all the time he's working on it. If there's nothing to it, fine, we can forget it. But it's got to be looked into." He shoved his coke bottle into the rack. "So let's finish the game and then get on back."

He pulled the driver out of his bag and walked out onto the tee. I looked at his big back. There was a dark streak down the middle of his shirt where the perspiration had soaked through. He bent down to tee up the ball.

Three more days, I thought, feeling choked with rage and fear. Three more stinking days and I'd have cleaned out the other account, the big one with the highway money in it, and been on the plane. Lorene. Good old dumb efficient Lorene. Damn her!

There wasn't going to be any Rio now. And there wasn't going to be any $7800 to cover the check that Johnny Taliferro had in the safe in the back of the liquor store where he made book. "Just write the check, for insurance, Mr. Jackson," he'd said. "And try not to make us do anything unpleasant." No, there wasn't going to be any way out for me—not if Abe Joseph got into the books and began calling the banks.

I looked at Graybow's back again. He rested his clubhead on the ground and turned his body around a quarter turn, from the hips, looking down the fairway, just as I had seen him do so many hundred times before. Only now every move he made to finish this game took me that much nearer to disaster.

He turned back to the golf ball and shifted his feet a little, setting himself.

You've got to do something now, I told myself, *now or never.*

I turned toward the vending machine quickly and pulled out a Number Two wood and stepped

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out onto the tee. Accidents are not too uncommon on golf courses. I had seen them myself. I had seen a man nearly killed when he stepped into the back swing of a short iron. Who was going to say how this accident had happened—who besides me? You can't prove anything from a score card or the fingerprints on a golf club. And by the time the shortage came out, the inquest would be over and I'd be gone—gone to Rio.

I moved up behind Graybow. He bent his knees a little and dropped his shoulders into the slightly hunched, familiar posture.

I looked down at the club I was holding. It looked strange to me, as though I were gripping it wrong. I aimed at the base of his skull and swung as hard as I could.

Graybow didn't even grunt. He went down to his knees, let go of his club, then pitched forward across it with his face in the dirt, and the blood was already pouring out of his ears when he hit the ground.

My throat hurt and I felt as if I were going to be sick.

I dropped the club and picked up the golf ball that was between Graybow's knees. Then I began to run toward the clubhouse.

I ran down the fairway and then cut into the trees and came out on the next fairway. I splashed through a water trap and started up through another grove of trees.

Running, I thought of what I was going to say. *Keep it simple,* I told myself. Two sentences: "I really don't know what happened. He was taking some practice swings, I guess, and he backed into my club." That was all. Two sentences.

I tripped and fell in the leaves and scrambled up again. My chest hurt and I could hear myself making a choking sound as I fought for more breath.

As I came out of the trees forty yards behind the big white clubhouse, two college kids in bright shorts and caps were coming down the steps with their golf bags on their shoulders, and I shouted, "Ambulance! Call an ambulance!"

One of them dropped his bag and went back inside and I sat down heavily on the grass and held my throbbing temples.

The other boy trotted out from the clubhouse and kneeled in front of me.

"What happened, man?"

"I really don't—"

But I couldn't finish even the first sentence, because I was looking at the heads of his left-handed golf clubs jutting out from the rim of his bag. And I was remembering the matching golf bags—Graybow's and mine—and those two left-handed woods of Graybow's, one of them beneath his body and the other lying next to him, with bits of his hair and scalp clinging to it—the one I had taken from the wrong bag . . .

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IN THE COURSE OF JUSTICE

by PHILIP MacDONALD

(continued from page 44)

Anna Bethlen lay in a deck chair in the little fenced patio behind the Sequoia Inn's Bungalow Eleven. There was a book on her knees, but she wasn't reading. She was basking in delicious peace made up of the sounds and silence of the forest as they blended with the warmth of the sun filtering down through the towering tree tops.

But the placid pattern was broken suddenly—by the blaring of a telephone in the room behind her.

The book slid to the ground as she jumped to her feet and hurried back into the bungalow, filled with a vague uneasiness.

In the living-room she hesitated before picking up the receiver. Who could be calling? Yesterday, it would only have been Nikolas. Or, just possibly, Julian Silberg of the Atomic Commission, from whom the Brandt alias was no secret. But today—today it might be that man from the newspaper in San Francisco.

The telephone rang again, and she picked it up, certain now it was the journalist.

But it wasn't. It was Julian Silberg. His voice came cautiously to her ear, "Is this Mrs. Brandt?"

She said, "Yes, Doctor Silberg—she is speaking—" and felt a twinge of anxiety.

"We—uh—we were wondering about Doctor—uh—about your husband—" Silberg's gentle voice was hesitant.

"He is not yet with you?" The twinge became a pang.

It must have shown in her voice, because Silberg's came back quickly, filled with would-be reassurance. He said, "Now please don't worry. It was merely that—well, he's generally so punctual—"

A comforting thought came to Anna and she said quickly, "Oh, I will tell you what it is that must have happened. He—the auto—they had suffered an outblow!" But as she spoke she glanced at the clock and saw its hands at twenty past three. Which meant that Nikolas had been delayed more than two hours—too long for a mere changing of a tire.

Silberg's voice was in her ear again. "A blowout? Yes. Or a flat tire. Yes, probably some mishap of that sort—"

Anna laughed. A beautiful performance which she wished she could believe in herself. She said, "Now perhaps he will do what I say and purchase the new tires!" And then, as Silberg laughed too, But please you will tell him to telephone me?"

"Of course, of course," said Silberg.

She hung up the telephone,

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dropped into a chair, and wished she didn't feel that painful void in her stomach. Then she heard footsteps on the flagstones outside and found herself on her feet, staring at the door.

The footsteps stopped—as she had known they would. The doorbell rang imperiously—as she had known it would.

She was at the door, pulling it open.

It was the man from the newspaper in San Francisco. But there was someone else with him now—a woman. Anna didn't look at the woman. She looked at the man and said, "What is it? What has happaned to Nikolas? Tell me!"

She saw surprise on his face—surprise that she had guessed his mission. He said, "He's not in danger, Mrs. Bethlen. He was hurt in an accident, but he's not in danger." He was looking into her face and she knew he was saying the truth.

Relief flooded through her, pulled the door wide. "Please," she said. "You must come in—" She was conscious of the woman again, and saw she was tall and erect and attractive in a slim, dark way. She said, "And the lady also."

They walked past her into the bungalow. Anna closed the door and faced the man, remembering him better without his hat, remembering she had liked him. She said, "Now you must tell me," and saw his troubled eye and smiled at him. "You are not to concern about me," she said. "I believe what you have said, but I must know matters, you see. About where he is. How is he hurt. Everything!"

"Of course." Mike wished he could return her smile. "His car ran off the road and turned over. About thirty miles from here. He was lucky—just concussion and some bruises. He's in a hospital in a little town called Logwood City." He glanced at Maggie and made a vague introductory gesture. "This is Mrs. Gray of the Logwood City press. Half an hour ago she spoke to the doctor. He told her your husband was conscious. And in pretty good shape—no complications."

"Thank you," Anna said. She looked from the man's face to the woman's and thought fleetingly, *She is like an Indian with that no-expression—a beautiful Indian.* She said, "You are kind, Mrs. Gray."

Acutely uncomfortable, Maggie made murmuring sounds, and was saved by Mike who said, "By the way, Mrs. Bethlen, I don't think I told you my name. It's Hackett, Michael Hackett—"

He stopped as Anna said sharply, "You say thirty miles? That is only—about only forty-five kilometers!" The dark eyes searched his. "He must have been hurt for many hours!"

"Yes," Mike said. "I—uh—I didn't get in touch with you before because—" He hesitated. "Well, you see, the situation's not so simple.

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Doctor Bethlen wasn't alone in the car."

She smiled. "Always Nikolas gathers passengers—" The smile faded, and she said sharply, "What is it that has happened?"

Mike struggled on. "There was only one passenger this time. A girl of sixteen—"

"She was not badly hurt!" Her eyes were wide with horror. "She was not—killed!"

"No. She wasn't hurt at all." Mike began to sweat. "But she says the accident was caused by Doctor Bethlen—uh—trying to kiss her."

Well, it was out! He found a handkerchief and mopped at his forehead. It gave him an excuse not to look at Anna.

But then, when her reaction came, it was so utterly unexpected that he gaped at her like an astonished child.

From staring at him in bewilderment, she had suddenly dropped into a chair, flung back her head, and begun to laugh.

It was bubbling, joyous laughter. It was irresistible—and in spite of everything Mike found himself smiling. But when he glanced at Maggie he saw that, far from smiling, she was staring at Anna Bethlen with extraordinary intentness.

The laughter died away as Anna sprang to her feet. "Oh, but I am sorry!" she cried. "I sit while you are standing! And I laugh when I should not laugh." A smile hovered around her mouth again. "But this picture of my poor sweet Nikky—it is so *ridiculous!* So—so majestically impossible!" The smile vanished, and the dark eyes flashed. "But underneath I am not laughing. I am angry!"

"I'd rather see you that way, Mrs. Bethlen," Mike said. "I hate to worry you, but this could be serious. Very serious."

Anna stared at him. "You do not mean that anyone would *believe* this story!.."

Mike was somber. "This girl," he said. "She's—sort of convincing." He didn't look at Maggie. "Mrs. Gray talked to her for half an hour, and believed every word she said."

"I did at the time." Maggie met Anna's gaze. "But I don't any more. I couldn't. Not since you laughed that way."

Anna said, "But my laughing—suppose that I could laugh again! —my laughing would not make *everyone* sure?" She was thoughtful, musing, then suddenly horrified. She gripped Mike's arm. "You mean he could be—ach! how you say it—prosecuted? Charged before the Court? You mean they might even—even prison him?" The fingers were like steel, sinking into his forearm.

"I don't know," he said sowly. "In this sort of case, in this country, anything can happen. A local court. Little Miss Star-Eyes of '57. A 'foreigner.'" He was floundering, and pulled himself up. "I don't know," he said again. "Frankly, I

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haven't been looking that far ahead."

The great dark eyes, puzzled now, were on his face. He couldn't avoid them. But he didn't know what more to say, or how to say it.

Maggie came to the rescue. "Mrs. Bethlen," she said, "I think you ought to know what this man's trying to do. Ever since the girl made this charge, he's had only one object. Against me, against the police, against every canon of his profession—even against common sense! —he's been trying his damnedest to keep it all *out* of the papers." Her voice was cool and level, and carried all the more conviction for that.

She went on, "I was mad at him to start with. But I sympathize now. He knows people and he knows America. He knows we have our own kind of Dictators and Tyrants. And he knows the worst of these is Public Opinion. Out of Press, by Radio-TV. No relation to Unbiased Thought!"

She stopped, as unexpectedly as she had begun, fumbled in her bag, found a cigarette, and lit it.

Anna gazed at her. "Thank you," she said. "Thank you very much." She turned to Mike and again put a hand on his arm, but this time the fingers didn't clench. "You are nice. You are *very* nice!" Her eyes searched his face. "You are now, at once, going to drive me to Nikolas?" she asked, and when he nodded she ran to the door of the bedroom and then disappeared.

Mike looked after her and shook his head admiringly. He then crossed to Maggie's chair and smiled. "To say I'm speechless would be an understatement," he said, and held out his hand.

She took it. Her hand felt just the way he'd known it would. Only more so.

"Think nothing of it," she said. "But tell me something. What's she going to do? What are *we* going to do?"

Mike began to pace. "I wish I knew," he said. "I wish to God I knew."

The shades over the windows had been raised, and sunlight flooded two-thirds of a sterile room.

But there was nothing friendly in the yellow glare. It left the bed in cold black shadow and outlined harshly the figure of the man on the wooden chair.

He was another of Them. Blue-uniformed like the first, but older, heavier. Small shrewd eyes bored out of his heavy face, and a thick voice from the slit of his mouth.

The thick voice was raining questions. And Nikolas was answering, fighting against the aching cloudiness in his head.

"You name's Nikolas Bethlen?"

"'No . . . Yes, but I—Yes, yes. That is my name."

"'But you been passin' under the alias Norbert Brandt?"

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"'Yes . . . But this is nothing. A foolishness. A desire only for privacy."

Then the chair hitching closer. The dark bulk bending nearer. The small eyes fixed, inescapable.

"'How long you been drivin' a car, Bethlen? How many years?"

"I am not sure. Eight, perhaps, or nine."

"Nine years, huh? How many of 'em with one hand?"

Here it was—the old familiar pattern! The simple question coming fast and faster—and then suddenly confusion!

"I am sorry, but I do not understand—"

"Okay. Suppose we try it over. Suppose we say you wouldn't of cracked up if you'd had both hands on the wheel?"

"I still do not understand. Always I drive with both my hands."

"Yeah? When you go off the road and across the shoulder? Over a ten-foot drop?"

"But—but this time I was startled. By the lorry. So huge, so fast! I turn the wheel—and then—then—I do not remember."

"You don't, huh? Well, I'll tell you somethin' you *do* remember. Your hitchhiker, your passenger."

Then memory flooding. *Juliet* . . . the little actress.

"The child, the child! For a moment she had gone from my mind. Please, tell me how is she?"

"She's okay, Bethlen. Pretty kid, uh?"

Something new in the voice! An oiliness behind the threat. An implication. A preposterous implication! And then a stabbing pain in his head, and the thick voice again: "Now quit stallin', Bethlen. You had your arm around her, didn't you? But she didn't like it, did she? She tried to pull away, but you wouldn't let her, huh? And that's why you swerved the car—"

This was monstrous! How could even Their minds conceive it! Drenched with sweat from the pain the effort cost him, he sat upright in the bed.

"But this—this is not what happens! It is impossible! You have only to task the child herself! She will tell you—"

"She did tell us, Bethlen—she told us plenty!"

Under Nikolas' eyes the blue figure blurred. The room rocked. He groaned and rolled over on his side.

Dimly he was aware of other figures in the room—a nurse in white—a tall figure he remembered as the doctor's . . .

Mike was driving fast, and though they were still in the valley, the hills were coming quickly nearer. No one had said anything for the past fifteen miles, and he was ashamed of the futility of his treadmill thinking—*What can we do? What can we do?* To get anywhere, he decided, he must focus on something, some one facet.

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At random he chose Logwood City's Captain of Police, and was struck by an unpleasant thought. "Hey!" he said, pitching his voice for Maggie in the back seat. "This guy Erhardt. You think he might've been up to something with us away? Like spilling the story on his own? Like calling AP or something?"

"Not a chance!" Maggie sat forward. "Except for questioning Doctor Bethlen—which he may or may not have done by now—he won't lift a finger till I get back."

"What's the angle?" Mike's hands tensed on the wheel. "What you got on him?"

"Nothing. But he's running for Sheriff next time. And don't think I couldn't be useful."

The flare of interest died away and Mike grunted again, dejectedly. Beside him, Anna Bethlen opened the purse on her lap, and pulled from it a plain billfold of brown leather. She said, "I am thinking—" and held the billfold up for him to see. It was thick with notes. "There are dollars here. Almost one thousand. Not a great sum, I know. But not small . . ." She hesitated. "This man you speak of? He is of the police? Is it possible that he—"

She was interrupted. "Absolutely not!" came Maggie's voice from behind them.

Anna sighed. Her shoulders lifted in a small disconsolate shrug, and she slipped the billfold into her purse. Mike cast a sidelong glance at her. They were through the foothills now, beginning the steep ascent, and you never knew with women.

He said bluntly, "Mrs. Bethlen, we're almost at the place where your husband's car went off the road. It's still there. Still upside down. You want to stop?"

"Please no," she said calmly, and then in the same breath but now in a shocked and startled cry, *"Oh!* His notebooks—all his papers!" For the first time she seemed shaken out of self-control. "They were of high importance to him! The highest!"

"It's okay." Mike reassured her. "I saw the cops—the police—picking them up."

"That is good." Anna sat back. "In all the other troubles I had forgotten them. And when they came back to my mind—I was afraid." A sad little smile touched her mouth. "So much trouble I had to arrange them. Exactly *here.*" Her hand thumped on the seat between them. "And with the typewriter, *here!* So that even while he drives they are close to his hand."

A thrill shot through Mike. He put on his brakes, hard. Anna swayed forward, and there was an exclamation from Maggie. He pulled over onto the shoulder of the road and came to a bumpy stop. He cut the engine and turned in his seat and looked at Anna. "Mrs. Bethlen, this may be impor-

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tant." He was carefully slow, deliberately calm. "Is it likely—is it possible?—that Doctor Bethlen would move those papers? For *any* reason?"

There was another exclamation from Maggie behind him. Anna stared at him and whispered, "No! Not for Mephisto himself!" She put a hand to her head. "I am idiot! Without brains! What happens to my mind that I do not see this before!"

But Mike was out of the car in a flurry, the door swinging open behind him. Caught up in the whirl of half-comprehended excitement, Anna Bethlen followed him, sliding across the seat and under the wheel. Out of the car, she found Maggie already at the edge of the bank, staring down over the drop, watching Mike as he finished his downward scramble and ran for the overturned sedan.

Anna drew in her breath sharply as she saw it. And then, like Maggie, she became intent on watching the man below.

He was by the upturned car now, peering through the open rear door. The upper half of his body disappeared through it. And then one leg, then the other . . .

"What is that he does?" Anna's hand closed on Maggie's arm.

"Looking for something," Maggie said. "Anything that might prove the girl was sitting in the *back* seat—"

After long minutes Mike's feet appeared again, then the rest of him. He ran back to the bank, climbed up it, and came racing toward them along the shoulder.

"But he has found nothing!" Anna said, and Maggie said, "Wait!" her eyes on Mike's clenched right hand.

He came up to them. He lifted the right hand and opened it. He said to Maggie, "How about this?"

On his palm was a button—a large button, covered with dark green cloth.

It was four fifteen when Mike burst again into the Logwood City Police Station. The door of the Captain's office was open. Erhardt looked up, saw him, and said, "Well, if it isn't Mr. Hackett back!" He sounded surprised, not too pleasantly. "Come on in."

Mike went into the room, closing the door behind him. The green coat was still folded on the bench. He checked an impulse to grab for it, and crossed to the desk and said, "Any developments, Captain?"

"We-ell—" Erhardt took his time. "Had a little talk with your Mister Bethlen. He didn't show so good in my book. Real scared." His small eyes searched Mike's face. "Where's Maggie—Mrs. Gray? I hear you and her went off some place in your car."

Mike said, "She came with me to pick up Mrs. Bethlen. She's taken her over to the hospital."

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"But there's somethin' else on your mind." Erhardt sat forward.

"Plenty," Mike said. "What would you say if I told you that Miss Barbara Clark was sitting in the *back* seat of Bethlen's car!"

And then he explained about the notebooks and the typewriter and where they'd been stacked. He pulled the green button from his pocket and held it out. "And I found this in the car—wedged in the back seat. Must've been there *before* the car turned over." He crossed to the bench, picked up the green coat, brought it back, and spread it out on the desk.

It had three buttonholes—but only two buttons. Where the third should have been was a shank of frayed thread.

Mike put the loose button down on the top of the thread, neatly. It was identical with the two others. "Sort of completes the picture," he said.

"Well I'll be damned!" There was angry wonder in Erhardt's voice. "That little tramp!" He heaved himself to his feet, strode to the door, opened it, and said to Rodzinski, "Call Mary Jensen. Tell her to get the Clark kid over here right away."

He was turning back into the room when there was a sound of quick footsteps and he said, "Hi there, Maggie," and held the door wide.

Maggie came past him into the room. She looked across at Mike, and smiled. She looked at the coat on the desk. She said to Erhardt, "We couldn't have been much wronger, could we?"

"Guess not," Erhardt said heavily. He picked up the loose button and slipped it into a pocket. He folded the green coat again and returned it to the bench. He came back to the desk, sat in his chair, and said, "I'll handle this *my* way, huh?"

He picked up a pencil, staring down as he turned it between his fingers. "Mrs. Bethlen?" he said. "She still over at the hospital?"

"Sure," said Maggie, and then quickly, "Hope you don't mind, Bob—I fixed it so everyone thought you'd okayed the visit."

Erhardt grunted and went on playing with the pencil.

Then there was nothing to do but wait.

After three minutes which seemed like ten there were sounds from the other side of the door, and then Rodzinski was ushering in Miss Barbara Clark. Behind her, Mary Jensen hovered in the doorway.

Erhardt looked at them. A genial look. He said, "Hello, Barbara." He nodded at Rodzinski, who shut the door, leaving the girl just inside it.

She stood quietly, giving Maggie a tired little smile, ignoring Mike and fixing her eyes on Erhardt. At first glance, Maggie thought, she seemed almost re-

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laxed—until one saw the way her hands gripped each other on the handle of the big shabby purse.

Erhardt got to his feet. He crossed to a corner, picked up a straight-backed wooden chair, brought it back to the desk, and set it down. He gave the girl a big fatherly smile and said, "You sit here, Barbara," and dropped back into his own chair and made a great business of searching in the pile of papers in front of him.

The girl sat down and Maggie went on watching her. She was in the strong light from the window now—light which underlined all the marks of strain in her young face. The deepened cheek-hollows. The dark smudges under the eyes. The little pulse which fluttered at the angle of the jaw.

As if she felt the scrutiny, the girl turned her head and for an instant Maggie found herself looking straight into the vivid blue eyes.

Then something happened to them. It was as if a sheet of gauze had suddenly been pulled away and she could really see them for the first time. They looked actually darker, filled with a whirling mixture of emotions she couldn't sort out. But they sent her a message.

Maggie was astonished. But she felt—it was almost a certainty!—that if she were to seize this moment, and not make any mistakes, and use a sympathetic approach, she could make the child break and admit her lies completely.

She started to get to her feet, then hesitated, and missed her chance—if it was a chance. Because now Erhardt pulled the Accident Report from the pile of papers and looked at the girl with another of the fatherly smiles. And opened his campaign.

"Sorry to be troublin' you, Barbara," he said. "But there's a couple of points need clearing up." He studied the flimsy sheets with a great show of concentration. "Seems we didn't get any information about the speed this man was drivin' at." He looked up. "I mean when he went off the road. Figure you can help us any?"

The girl shifted in her chair, and the big purse nearly fell from her knees. She caught it and set it down on a corner of the desk. She said, "I don't think I know. It wasn't very fast," and there was no change in her voice. Nothing to match that sudden revelation in the eyes.

Maggie leaned forward and saw that the gauze was over the girl's eyes once more.

Erhardt said, "Try and remember, honey. We gotta put it in the report. Now, from where you were sittin' up front you could see the speedometer. Did you look at it any time?"

"I don't know. I don't think I did." The girl moved a little on her chair. "I'm sorry, I don't remember."

There was still no change in her

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voice, but Maggie fancied she could detect a new tension in the carriage of the head. She wondered about Erhardt's approach. She looked at him, and saw he was leaning back in his chair and searching his pockets.

Frowning, he mumbled something that sounded like, "Now where did I put 'em?" And then the frown faded and he pulled a crumpled pack of cigarettes from a pocket. And with it the button.

He looked down at the button in wide-eyed surprise. Overdoing it, Maggie thought. "Whaddya know," he said. "I forgot all about this. Would it be yours, honey? Off of your coat," He reached over the desk, holding the button in his palm.

The girl took it from his hand. "Oh, thanks," she said. "Thanks a lot." Maggie could not hear any hesitancy in her voice. She wondered if she'd been wrong just now about that extra tension.

Erhardt said, "It was in the car." He flipped a cigarette out of the pack. "Guess it must have come off while you were tryin' to pull away from Brandt."

The girl sat very straight, her hands in her lap. "Oh, no," she said. "No. It couldn't have been then." Her voice was lower now. "You see, I wasn't wearing it—my coat, I mean. It was in the back. With my suitcase and that typewriter. And all those books he had."

Maggie caught her breath. Erhardt dropped the cigarette. Mike, who had been leaning against the wall by the window, stood suddenly straight.

Erhardt mumbled, "Oh, yeah. The typewriter, huh? And the notebooks." He took a long time picking up the cigarette and lighting it. He said, "Funny. Here I've been thinkin' all along you were wearin' the coat."

"Oh, no. You see, I took it off before we started." The blue eyes were wide and patient. "Before I helped him move the things."

Maggie thought, *"You little devil! You cunning, smart, evil little beast!"* She couldn't take her eyes from the childish profile.

"How d'you mean?" Erhardt was off balance. "What things? Move 'em where?"

"The typewriter and the books." Now the voice was as patient as her eyes. "They were on the front seat when he stopped. Right beside him. I was going to get in the back, but he said it would be better if I rode in front. So he got out and I helped him move the things. And he put my suitcase in. And the sun was getting sort of warm, so before we started I took my coat off and put it in the back too."

There was a silence. Aghast, Maggie shot a glance at Erhardt—and saw that he was looking at her. He was frowning, and the frown deepened as he turned his head to stare at Mike.

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And why wouldn't he be frowning, thought Maggie miserably. The little monster was so terrifyingly believable! And never more so than in this last effort. She went on watching Erhardt. He was looking at the girl now, and he wasn't frowning. Or, if he was, it wasn't the same sort of frown. As well as if he'd told her, Maggie knew it would take very little to swing him back to what had been his original belief in Miss Barbara Clark.

It was given to him, by Miss Barbara Clark herself. With flawless timing, before the little silence could grow into significance.

"I would've told you before," said Miss Barbara Clark. "Only you didn't ask me." The blue eyes were shy, apologetic. "I'm awfully sorry. I didn't know it would be important."

(concluded on page 112)

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THE PERFECT PLAN

by JAMES HILTON

EVERY PUBLIC MAN HAS HIS ENemies, but few of these enemies would wish to murder him or are in a position to do so. Sir George Winthrop-Dunster, however, was unfortunate in these respects. He had his enemies, and one of them, his secretary, both wished to murder him, and did so.

Sir George, as chairman of the Anglo-Oceanic group of companies, was what is called "a well-known figure in the City." He belonged to the modern school of financiers who instead of being fat, heavy-jowled, gold-ringed, and white-spatted, look more like an overgrown public-school prefect. He was fifty-five, played energetic squash-rackets, wore neat lounge suits, and as often as not lunched in a pub off a glass of sherry and a ham sandwich.

Scarsdale, his private secretary, was not unlike him in physique, but nearly a quarter of a century younger. With a First in Greats at Oxford and a B.Sc. Econ. of London, he was well equipped to deal with the numerous complications of Sir George's affairs, and for five years he had given every satisfaction. Well, almost. Just one little rift had once appeared—in 1928, when Scarsdale had rashly bought Amal. Zincs in greater quantities than he had cash to pay for. He had not exactly pledged Sir George's credit in the transaction, but he had made use of Sir

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George's stockbroker, and when the account finished with Amal. Zincs well down, it was to Sir George that he had perforce to confess the little mishap. A hundred pounds more than covered everything, and Sir George wrote a check instantly. He did not lecture, or even rebuke; he merely specified arrangements by which the sum could be repaid out of Scarsdale's monthly salary.

This amounted to three hundred a year, and within two years the debt had been fully repaid, plus interest at 5 per cent. No other unfortunate incident had occurred, and the relations between the two men seemed as good as ever.

Then, in 1930, Scarsdale received a tentative offer for a better post. It was an important one, and his prospective employer, purely as a matter of routine, wished to effect a fidelity insurance for which a testimonial from Sir George would be necessary.

When Scarsdale approached Sir George about this, the financier talked to him with all the suavity he usually reserved for shareholders' meetings. "My dear Scarsdale," he replied, in his curiously high-pitched voice, "I have no objection whatever to your leaving me, but I have, I admit, a certain reluctance to putting my name to any statement that is not absolutely correct. Take this question, for instance: 'Have you always found him to be strictly honest and reliable while in your service?' Now, my truthful reply to that would be: 'With one exception, yes.' Do you think that would help you?"

Obviously it would have been worse than no reply at all, and in default of the required testimonial the offer of the job fell through, and Scarsdale remained Sir George's secretary. Sir George, no doubt, congratulated himself on having secured a permanently good bargain. He was that kind of man.

But had he known it, he was really much less to be congratulated For just as Sir George was *that* kind of man, so Scarsdale was another kind, equally rare perhaps.

It was not until a year had passed that Scarsdale decided that the time had come to murder Sir George. During the interval he had begun to regard the matter with something of the detachment of the chess player; indeed, the problem had rather comforted than worried him amid the botherations of a secretary's life. He had always, since his school days, been interested in the science of crime, and never for a moment did he doubt his own capacity to do the job; it was merely a question of waiting until the perfect moment offered itself.

That moment seemed to him to be arriving in February 1931—his choice being determined by two fortuitous circumstances—(1) that at 8 P.M. on Saturday the 22nd, Sir George was to deliver a broadcast talk on "Post-War Monetary Pol-

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icy," and (2) that immediately after the talk, which was to be given from the London studio, he intended to travel to Banbury to spend the week-end with his brother Richard.

On the morning of the 22nd Scarsdale awoke at his usual time at Bramstock Towers, Berkshire. It was a pleasant establishment, surrounded by a large and well-wooded estate, and Scarsdale, glancing through the window as he dressed, was glad to see that there had been no rain during the night and that the weather was fine and cold.

Sir George always breakfasted in his bedroom, and did not meet his secretary until ten o'clock, in the library. By this time Scarsdale had, as usual, been at work for an hour or so opening letters and typing replies for Sir George's signature. After an exchange of good mornings, Sir George made a very customary announcement. "I'll just look through these letters, Scarsdale; then we'll take a turn round the garden while I tell you about my wireless talk tonight. I want you to prepare a few notes for me . . ."

"Certainly, Sir George," replied Scarsdale. A great piece of luck, for the after-breakfast tour of the estate, though almost an institution in fine weather, might just, for one reason or another, have gone foregone.

The men were soon dressed for outdoors and strolling briskly across the terrace toward the woods—the usual gambit, Scarsdale observed, with continued satisfaction. Sir George meanwhile divided his attention between the garden and his impending radio talk. "You see, about the American Federal Reserve note issue. . . . Ah, that *cupressus macrocarpa* seems to be doing nicely. . . . And a month-to-month table of Wall Street brokers' loans. . . ." And so on, till they were deep in the woods, over half a mile from the house. The thickets, even in mid-winter, were very dark. "I want your notes by three at the latest, so that I can catch the 3:50 from Lincott and work up my talk in the train . . . Ah, just look at that—Fanning really ought to notice these things. Confound the fellow!"

Fanning was the head gardener, and "that" was nothing more dreadful than an old kettle under a bush. But to Sir George it was serious enough, for if there was one thing that annoyed him more than another it was the suggestion of trespassers on his land. "Why the devil don't Fanning and his men keep their eyes open?" he exclaimed crossly; but in that he did Fanning an injustice, since the kettle had not been there more than a few hours; Scarsdale, in fact, had placed it there himslf the evening before.

Suddenly Scarsdale cried, "Why, look there, sir—the door of the hut's open! A tramp, I suppose. Wonder if he's still inside, by any chance."

At this point Sir George began to

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behave precisely as Scarsdale had guessed and hoped he would. He left the path and strode vehmently amid the trees and undergrowth toward the small square building just visible in the near distance. "By Jove, Scarsdale," he shouted, "if I catch the fellow I'll teach him a lesson."

"Yes, rather," agreed Scarsdale.

Striding together through the less and less penetrable thickets, they reached the hut at last. It was built of gray stone, with a stout wooden door—the whole edifice intended originally as a sort of summerhouse, but long disused. For years it had functioned at rare intervals as a store place for sawn-up logs; but now, as Scarsdale entered it, it proved empty even of them. Nor was there a tramp in it, either.

"He must have gone, sir," said Scarsdale, pulling wide open the half-gaping door. "Though it does look as if he's left a few relics . . . I say, sir, what do you make of this?" He waited for Sir George to enter. "Damnation, that's my last match gone! Have you a match, Sir George?"

As Sir George began to fumble in his pocket in the almost complete darkness Scarsdale added, "I say, sir, you've dropped something—your handkerchief, I think."

Sir George stooped, and at the same instant Scarsdale shot him neatly through the head with a small automatic pistol which he had that very morning abstracted from the drawer of the boule cabinet in Sir George's private study.

Afterward, still wearing gloves, of course, he placed the weapon by the side of the dead man, closed the door carefully from the outside, and walked away.

All murders—all enterprises of any kind, in fact—carry with their accomplishments a certain minimum of risk; and at this point, as Scarsdale had all along recognized, the risks began. Fortunately, they were small ones. The hut was isolated and only rarely visited; Fanning and his men were not interested in it at all, and the whole incident of the visiting tramp had been a mere invention to lure Sir George to the spot. Scarsdale felt reasonably sure that the body would remain undiscovered until a deliberate search were made.

Leaving the woods, he returned to the house by way of the garage. There he took out his two-seater car, drove it round to the front of the house, and had a friendly chat with Wilkes, the butler. "Oh, Wilkes, would you mind bringing down Sir George's suitcase? He's decided to go right on to town immediately, so he won't be in to lunch. He's walking over to Lincott through the fields . . . Oh, and you might label the bag for Banbury—I've got to get it sent off at the station."

"Will you be returning to lunch yourself, sir?"

"Oh, yes."

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"Very good, sir."

Lincott, which Scarsdale reached through winding lanes within a quarter of an hour, was a middle-sized village with a large and important railway junction. There were three facts about Lincott that were, from Scarsdale's point of view, fortunate—(1) its railway station was large, frequented, and badly lit; (2) there were convenient expresses to London, as well as a late "down" train at night; and (3) Sir George's estate offered a pleasant short cut to the village, a short cut which Sir George was fond of transversing on foot and alone, even after dark.

Scarsdale drove direct to the junction and left the suitcase for despatch to Banbury, whence it would be forwarded immediately to the house of Sir George's brother. Then he proceeded to a neighboring garage, arranged to leave his car until called for, and asked to use the telephone. Ringing up the Towers, he had a second amiable talk with Wilkes. "Oh, hullo, Wilkes—this is Scarsdale speaking—from Lincott. Sir George has slightly changed his plans again—or rather my plans. He wants me to go along to town with him right away. Yes . . . Yes . . . I'm leaving my car here . . . Yes, that's what I want to tell you—I've decided that as I'm going to town I may as well spend the week-end there at my club . . . I'll be back on Tuesday, you know . . . Yes . . . Goodbye."

Scarsdale then walked to the junction, booked a third-class single ticket to Paddington, and caught the 1 P.M. train. At Paddington he did several things. First, he went to the local booking-office and purchased a third-class single ticket to Ealing. Then he took a snack at a nearby A.B.C. shop, and about 3 P.M. traveled by omnibus to the bank, whence he walked to the Anglo-Oceanic offices in Bishopgate.

There he met several people whom he knew very well, chatted with them affably, and busied himself for some time in Sir George's private office. "Yes, Sir George is in town, but he's very busy—I don't suppose you'll see him here today." Williamson, one of the head-office people, grinned. "Yes, he's busy," Scarsdale repeated, faintly returning the grin. Thy both knew that there were aspects of Sir George's life that had nothing to do with the Anglo-Oceanic companies. "Taking her to the theatre, eh?" queried Williamson.

"More likely to the cinema," returned Scarsdale. "He's not free tonight, anyhow—he's got a date at the B.B.C.—and left me the devil's own pile of work to finish, too."

It was quite natural, therefore, that Scarsdale should still be at work in Sir George's private office when Williamson and the rest of the staff left. At 6 P.M., by which time the huge office building was tenantless, Scarsdale, having pre-

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viously made fast the door on the inside, turned to a little job that he had not cared to tackle before.

Opening the safe by means of the combination, the carefully abstracted certain documents—to be precise, South American bearer bonds to the value of between thirty and forty thousand pounds. How odd, he reflected, that Sir George, who would not give him a simple testimonial of honesty, had never scrupled to leave the keys and combination of his private safe in an unlocked bureau drawer at the Towers!

Leaving the Anglo-Oceanic offices about 6:30 P.M., Scarsdale took a bus to Piccadilly Circus and entered a cinema that was showing a film so remarkably bad that in the five-and-ninepenny seats he had almost an entire row to himself at that early hour of the evening. There and then, in the surrounding gloom, he managed to transform himself into a fairly credible impersonation of sir George Winthrop-Dunster. In build and dress they were rather similar: nothing else was required but a few touches of grease-paint, a false mustache, and the adjustment of Sir George's characteristic type of horn-rimmed spectacles. The disguise would have deceived anyone who did not know Sir George intimately.

Scarsdale left the cinema about 7:30, choosing the middle of a film. A few moments in a telephone booth enabled him, with the help of a pocket mirror, to make good any small deficiencies in his quick change. It had all, so far, been delightfully easy. At 7:55 he took a taxi to the old B.B.C. headquarters in Savoy Hill.

Neither he nor Sir George had ever broadcast before, and Scarsdale was quite genuinely interested in the experience. In the reception room he had an amiable chat with one of the studio officials, and found no difficulty at all in keeping up the character and impersonation of Sir George. Indeed, he not only talked and behaved like Sir George, but he found himself even thinking as Sir George—which was rather horrible.

At eight o'clock he took his place in the thick-carpeted studio and began to read from his typed manuscript. It was a cosy and completely restful business. With the little green-shaded lamp illuminating the script and the perfectly silent surroundings, it was a comfort to realize that, by such simple means, he was fabricating an alibi that could be vouched for afterward by hundreds of thousands of worthy folk all over the country. He read Sir George's views on monetary policy with a perfection of utterance that surprised even himself, especially the way he had got the high-pitched voice.

Leaving the studios half an hour later he asked the commissionaire in the hall to get him a taxi, and in the man's hearing told the driver "Paddington."

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There he commenced another series of operations. First he put through a long distance call to Richard Winthrop-Dunster, of Banbury. "That you, Richard?" sang out the high-pitched voice, still functioning. "I'm extremely sorry, but I'm afraid I won't be able to spend the week-end at your place after all. Fact is, I've got a rather worrying piece of business on hand at the moment, and I can't spare the time . . . Yes, things *are* infernally worrying just now . . . Next week I might come—I'll try to, anyhow, so you might keep my bag, if it's arrived—oh, it *has,* has it? Yes, I told young Scarsdale to send it . . . Yes, that's right keep it till next week . . . I'm at Paddington, just about to catch the 9:15 home—yes, I've just come from the studio—were you listening? . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Goodbye, then—next week, I hope."

Then Scarsdale went to the booking office and purchased a first-class single ticket to Lincott. Passing the barrier, he even risked a word or two with the man who snipped his ticket and who knew Sir George slightly. "Cold evening, Sir George," the man said.

Scarsdale found an empty first-class compartment and as soon as the train moved out from the platform, he opened the small nondescript attaché-case which he had carried with him all day. With the help of its contents, he began to make sundry changes in his personal appearance; then taking from his pocket a single ticket to Ealing purchased earlier in the day, he cut out of it a triangular section similar to that snipped from his Lincott ticket.

Finally, at Ealing, a slim, clean-shaven fellow in a cloth cap might have been seen to leave the train and climb the steps to the street. He carried a brown-paper parcel which, if examined, would have been found to contain (rather oddly) an attaché-case.

Scarsdale boarded a bus going east, and at Ealing Common changed to an Underground train. At 10 P.M.—long before the train from Paddington would have reached Lincott—Scarsdale, himself again, was entering a West End restaurant and exchanging a cordial good evening with a head waiter who knew him well by sight.

Throughout the week-end Scarsdale stayed in London, visiting numerous friends—indeed, there was scarcely an hour from morning to midnight which he did not spend in someone's company. His nights at the club were conveniently preluded by friendly chats with the hall porter, and in the mornings, at breakfast, he was equally affable to the waiter.

On Tuesday afternoon he returned to the Towers, collecting his car at Lincott on the way, and got to work immediately on Sir George's accumulated correspondence. "I know Sir George will ex-

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pect to find everything finished," he explained to Wilkes.

But dinner time came and Sir George did not arrive. It was peculiar, because he was usually back by the six o'clock train whenever he visited his brother.

At nine Scarsdale decided to have dinner without further waiting; but when ten o'clock came and it was clear that Sir George had not caught the last train from Banbury, Scarsdale agreed with Wilkes that Richard Winthrop-Dunster had better be informed of the situation. "Maybe Sir George is staying there an extra night," said Scarsdale, as the butler hurried to the telephone.

Five minutes later Wilkes returned with a pale and troubled face. "Mr. Richard says that Sir George never visited him at all, sir," he began falteringly. "He says Sir George rang him up late on Saturday night from Paddington canceling the visit and saying he was on his way back here."

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Scarsdale. "Why isn't he here then? Where the devil can he be?"

They discussed the problem with an increasing degree of consternation until midnight, and went to bed with mutually expressed hopes that some message might arrive by the morning's post. But none came. At noon, after consultation with Scarsdale and further telephoning to Banbury, Wilkes notified the police.

Inspector Deane, of the local force, arrived during the afternoon, and after acquainting himself with the known details of the situation, motored over to Banbury to see Mr. Richard Winthrop-Dunster.

On Thursday morning inquiries began at Paddington station, with immediate and gratifying result. As Inspector Deane put it, "Well, Mr. Scarsdale, we've traced Sir George as far as the Lincott train on Saturday night—there's a ticket inspector at Paddington who remembers him. We're not quite sure of him at Lincott, but no doubt he must have been seen there too."

Everything, Scarsdale was glad to perceive, was still working out perfectly according to plan.

From Paddington the trail had already led to Lincott; soon it would lead from Lincott to the Towers—and on the way, to be discovered inevitably when the constabulary intelligence had progressed so far, was that little hut in the woods.

But it was not part of Scarsdale's plan to anticipate this inevitability merely said, "Perhaps you could advertise for information. The taximen in the station yard may have noticed him, or one of them may have driven him somewhere. Of course, if it was a fine night he may have walked. He often walks. It was a fine night in London, I remember."

"Quite so, sir," agreed Inspector Deane.

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It was queer how the two men "took to" each other; Scarsdale had a delightful knack of putting people at their ease. But for the mischance of working for Sir George, he would probably never have murdered anybody.

The plan remained perfect—indeed, he thought, as he settled for sleep that night, he could afford almost to be indifferent now; the dangerous interval was past, and it no longer greatly mattered when or how the body was discovered. Perhaps it would be tomorrow, or the next day, or the next week even, if the police were exceptionally stupid.

He had in mind exactly what would happen subsequently. The medical evidence would, of course, be vague after such a lapse of time, but fully consistent with Sir George's death having taken place late on Saturday night, at an hour (if the matter were ever called into question) when he, Scarsdale, had several complete alibis sixty miles away. Then would come the question: How had it happened?

At such a juncture the dead man's brother would probably recall that Sir George had stated over the telephone on the fatal night that he was "worried" about some business affair. Scarsdale would then, with a little reluctance to discuss the private affairs of his late employer, admit that Sir George had had certain financial troubles of late.

The next stage of revelation would doubtless be enacted at the Anglo-Oceanic office, when and where the disappearance of the bonds would be discovered. That would certainly cause a sensation, both in the City and beyond. Clearly it would suggest that Sir George, having monkeyed with the assets of his companies, had taken his life rather than face the music.

All this, of course, was according to Scarsdale's plan, and when, on Thursday morning, the police found the body of Sir George in the little hut in the woods, Scarsdale might have been excused for reckoning his plan ninety-nine per cent infallible. Unfortunately for him, the remaining one per cent took a hand, with the rather odd result that a man named Hansell was arrested a few hours later and charged with the murder of Sir George.

Hansell was an unemployed workman turned tramp, and had been arrested in a Lincott public house after trying to pawn a watch which an alert shopman recognized as Sir George's. At first, Hansell gave the usual yarn about having found the watch, but after a severe questioning at the police station he told a much more extraordinary story.

On the previous Saturday, he said, about a quarter past eight in the evening, he had been trespassing in the woods belonging to the Tower estate. Finding the little

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hut he had pushed open the door and there, to his great alarm and astonishment, had come across the dead body of a man.

His first impulse was to go for help immediately, but as he felt that his own position might be thought rather questionable, he had contented himself in the end with rifling the pockets and decamping. He admitted having taken some papers and a wallet, which he had since destroyed, except for a few treasury notes it had contained. He had also taken the watch.

But at 8:15 P.M., as the police detectives did not fail to point out, Sir George had been broadcasting a talk from the B.B.C. studio in London. How, then, could he have been found sixty miles away, dead, at the same hour? Obviously Hansell must be a great liar.

He was brought before the local magistrates and speedily committed for trial at the assizes. Meanwhile, Scarsdale, in the midst of well-simulated grief at the loss of a respected employer, was thinking hard.

The arrest of Hansell had given him a shock, but he was not long in finding a way of fitting it into his plan. Indeed, now that the suicide theory was all out of focus, Scarsdale himself thought fit to make the discovery about the missing bonds, and was inclined to agree with the police when they suggested that the bonds might have been among the papers that Hansell had stolen from Sir George's pockets and afterward destroyed.

The trial of Hansell came on in due course. He pleaded "Not Guilty," but his story sounded pretty thin, and was not improved by the fact that he still insisted that he found the body at 8:15 P.M. He had heard the Lincott church clock chime the quarter, he said, and no amount of cross-examination could shake him. Moreover, the prosecution were able to prove that his fingerprints were on the automatic pistol. Hansell explained this by saying that he had found the weapon lying beside the body and had picked it up; but the story was unconvincing.

Was it not more likely that Sir George had been taking the short cut home from Lincott station (as he often did), that he had been attacked by Hansell and had drawn his automatic (which he often carried) to defend himself, that Hansell had wrested it from him, had shot him with it, and had afterward dragged the body into the shed and, in sheer panic, left the telltale weapon behind?

Defending counsel could only offer the alternative theory of suicide, which, in the case of so well-respected a personage as Sir George, seemed a breach of taste as well as a straining of probability. As for Hansell, he must, whatever he said, have mistaken the time of his visit to the hut. Neither of these sugges-

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tions appealed to judge and jury, and it was not surprising that Hansell was found guilty and sentenced to death. This was afterward commuted to penal servitude for life.

Scarsdale, with the trial over and everything settling down, had now only the tail end of his plan to put into cautious execution. He would wait, he had decided, for twelve months (to avoid any semblance of flight), and then go abroad, probably to the Argentine, taking with him the bonds. After a year or two in Buenos Aires he would doubtless have formed a sufficiently intimate connection with some banker or stockbroker to enable him to begin disposing of the booty.

It has already been noted that the verdict of "Murder" instead of "Suicide" did not disturb the vast and almost terrifying equanimity of Scarsdale. What did trouble him, however, as time passed and the death of Sir George became history, was the gradually invading consciousness that the only thing that had saved him from the dock, and possibly from the gallows, was not his precious plan at all, but sheer luck!

For if Hansell had reported the finding of the body without delay, the faked alibi of the broadcast would have been discovered. Scarsdale had been saved, then, not by the flawlessness of his own brainwork but by a casual circumstance entirely outside of his control!

It was an unwelcome conclusion to reach, partly because it robbed him of pride in achievement, but chiefly because it laid him open to disquieting thoughts of the future.

During the year of waiting in England he lived at Kew, renting a house near the river and living on his savings while he devoted himself to writing a book on his favorite subject—criminology. It passed the time; besides, he had hopes that it would eventually establish his reputation.

He received several minor shocks during this period.

One happened when an acquaintance named Lindsey accosted him suddenly at his club and apropos of nothing at all said, "You know, Scarsdale, you're awfully like old Dunster in appearance. Did you ever realize that? I'm sure you could easily have passed for him during his lifetime with the help of a false mustache and those giggles of his! Especially, too, if you could have managed that rather shrill way of talking he had. And you *are* a bit of an actor, aren't you? Didn't you once play in something at Oxford?"

Scarsdale wondered whether his face were turning fiery red or ashen pale. He managed to laugh, and an hour or so later reached the satisfying conclusion that it had all been pure chance—nothing but that. But it was upsetting, all the same, and it was about this time that he began the habit of carrying a small automatic pistol about with

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him wherever he went. He would not be taken alive.

Just about a month before the year was up, the same Lindsey telephoned him with immense cheerfulness one morning. "Oh, hullo, Scarsdale. I'm in a job now and you'll never guess where. It's in the B.B.C. . . ." Several minutes of excited chatter, and then, "By the way, how would you like to do a short talk on Crimes and Criminals, or something of the sort? We're getting up a series here and your name occurred to me—you've always been keen on the subject, haven't you? What about June 11th, say?"

Scarsdale had hoped to be in Buenos Aires by that date, but he could not very well say so, and some kind of caution urged him not to make excuses. Besides, he could not help being slightly thrilled at the prospect of making a whole country listen to his views on crime and criminals. He told Lindsey that the date would suit him quite well.

During the eight weeks' interval, however, there came to him once or twice the faintest possible misgiving—soon banished, but leaving a flavor of anxiety behind.

On the evening of June 11th he did not feel at his best as he set out for Savoy Hill. He was due to speak from 8 P.M. until 8:20, and he could not escape the recollection of the last time he had entered the building.

It was odd, perhaps, that the very same announcer should be welcoming him again now, though it was quite natural, no doubt, that the announcer, knowing that Scarsdale had been Sir George's secretary should begin to chat about the deceased gentleman. "Awfully sad business that was," commented the familiar dulcet tones. "I talked to him that very evening just as I'm talking to you now. Amazing that he should have been so near his tragic end—indeed, I often wonder if he had any premonition of it himself, because he seemed just slightly uneasy in manner."

"Did he?" said Scarsdale.

"Of course it may have been my imagination. I was only comparing him with other times I'd heard him speak—at company meetings. Fortunately, I'd already sold all my Anglo-Oceanics. Queer he should have been carrying all those bonds about with him—forty thousand pounds' worth of them, wasn't it?"

"It was never absolutely proved."

"But bearer bonds, weren't they? Doesn't that mean that anybody who got hold of them could raise money on them?"

"More or less," answered Scarsdale absently. He had suddenly begun to feel troubled. He wished he had not arrived early enough for this chat.

By 7.55 the announcer had reached the stage of offering a few general tips about broadcasting. "This is your first experience of the

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microphone, I understand, Mr. Scarsdale?"

Scarsdale nodded.

"Curious—I thought I recognized your face. Or perhaps you're very like someone else . . . However, you'll soon get over mike-fright, even if you do have a touch of it at first. The chief point to remember is, never to speak too fast or in a very high-pitched voice. But then, you don't, as a matter of fact, do you?"

Scarsdale was a trifle pale. "I don't think so," he murmured.

Five minutes later he sat at the little desk before the microphone, with the green-shaded lamp before him. He was certainly nervous, and beyond his nervousness, strangely uneasy in a deeper sense. It was peculiar; he hadn't been like it before.

As he sat down, his foot caught in the cord that connected the lamp with the wall-plug; the lamp went out, but it did not matter; the globes overhead were sufficient to see by.

He waited for the red light to deliver its signal, indicating that he had been properly introduced to his unseen audience; then he began to read his manuscript.

But all the time he was reading, he was thinking and pondering subconsciously . . . he had been there before . . . the announcer had thought so, too . . . the announcer had seen and heard Sir George in the flesh at company meetings . . . the announcer had told him he must avoid a high-pitched voice . . . bearer bonds . . . this was the very same studio —and the same time also—eight o'clock . . . and it was Lindsey who had fixed up his talk, and Lindsey who had once commented on his likeness to Sir George . . .

Suddenly the idea burst over him in full force, monstrous, all-conquering: this was all a plant—engineered jointly by Lindsey and the B.B.C—with perhaps Scotland Yard in the discreet background. They were testing him, and by the very latest psychological methods, as expounded by the great French criminologists . . .

They had guessed the truth and were subtly—it was *their* perfect plan seeking to undermine *his!*

At that moment, while Scarsdale's eyes and voice were reading automatically, the announcer stole into the room and silently replaced the lamp-plug in the wall-socket. The green light blazed suddenly into Scarsdale's face as the intruder, in a whisper too soft to be audible to the microphone, murmured, "Pulled it off, didn't you? I thought that's what must have happened . . ."

Scarsdale's broadcast talk on Crimes and Criminals will never, it is safe to say, be forgotten in the history of the radio. Most listeners, as the talk progressed, must have been aware of a growing tension in the speaker's delivery. But it is certain that no listener remained

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unthrilled when, about sixteen minutes past eight, Scarsdale exclaimed, in a voice vibrating with excitement, "And here, if I may be permitted, I will interpose an example of what I consider to be the really perfect, undetectable crime . . . *I myself murdered Sir George Winthrop-Dunster* . . ."

At this point the loud-speakers in some hundreds of thousands of homes delivered themselves of a mysterious crashing sound, followed by a long silence until 8:35, when a familiar Oxford accent expressed regret for the delay and read, without further comment, the continuation of the evening's program.

In the morning, however, the newspapers were less reticent. Scarsdale, it appeared, had made history by being the first person actually to commit suicide before the microphone. He had shot himself.

The inquest was held the following day and attracted great attention. The announcer was very gentle and soothing in giving evidence —almost as if he were reading an S.O.S. "It seemed to me," he said, "that Mr. Scarsdale was rather upset about something when he arrived at the studio. He was a few minutes early and we chatted together. We talked a little about Sir George Winthrop-Dunster. I concluded that Mr. Scarsdale was probably nervous, as it was his first broadcast. About halfway through the talk I noticed that the lamp over his desk had gone out—he must have caught his foot in the cord and pulled the plug away. I went in to put it right for him and noticed then that he wasn't looking at all well. He was very pale, and he stared at me in a rather queer way when I mentioned something about the light. A few minutes later I had to put up the signal warning him not to talk in such a high-pitched voice because the sound wasn't coming through properly. The next I heard was his extraordinary statement about—er—Sir George Winthrop-Dunster. Of course I rushed to cut off the microphone immediately, but before I could do so I heard the shot . . ."

The verdict was naturally one of "Suicide during temporary insanity."

Even the last of Scarsdale's plans went astray. Instead of being fearfully acknowledged as the perpetrator of the world's perfect murder, he was dismissed as that familiar and rather troublesome type —the neurotic person who confesses to a crime of which he is quite obviously innocent.

"Poor Scarsdale," said Inspector Deane, in a special interview for one of the Sunday papers, "had been deeply distressed by the tragic death of his employer, and that, coupled with his interest in criminology—I understand he was writing a book on the subject—had combined to unhinge his mind—

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. . . We often get similar confessions during well-known murder trials, and as a rule, as on this occasion, we can spot them at a glance."

Answering a further question, Inspector Deane remarked, "As a matter of fact, Scarsdale wasn't within fifty miles of Lincott during the whole of the time that the crime could possibly have been committed. We know that, because in the ordinary course of police routine we had to check up his movements . . . Poor fellow, we all liked him. He helped us a good deal in our work, though it was clear all the time that he was feeling things badly."

Just one point remains about those bonds.

If ever it should be discovered that Scarsdale had had in his possession a small fortune in South American bearer certificates, a certain measure of suspicion would inevitably have been cast on him—although posthumously.

But will such a discovery be made? Scarsdale had put them in a tin box and buried the box three feet deep in the back garden of the house he rented at Kew; and who, pray, is ever likely to dig them up?

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recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **STEWART BEACH**

TITLE: ***Death on the Rocks***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: Gray's Neck, New England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The tragedy had occurred the previous summer—but the ghostly memory of it still stared from the house next door.*

OVER THE WINTER I THINK MOST of us who make up the summer colony at Gray's Neck forgot the sharpness of tragedy we felt that moonlit September night when Ann Farnsworth fell to her death on the rocks that line the Cape Cod Canal. But the memory stared at Pamela and me when we moved back the following June. The Farnsworths' house was next to ours. It stood there, a big ark of a place with winter blinds masking its windows and doors, desolate against the sea of a new summer.

Pamela surveyed it bleakly the Friday we drove up from New York with the children in the packed station wagon. There was a moon, and long shadows were like a dark frame for the memory. Pam shivered a little.

"I wish David Farnsworth had rented it to someone," she said. "Someone with kids. Charlie, it's going to haunt us all summer long!"

I felt that, too, but I said, "David's in Europe. Probably he didn't want to think about the house."

"He's thought about having the lawn cut," Pamela said practically. "And the garden tended."

We turned into our drive, and the children tumbled out in the excitement of rediscovery that kids feel when they come back to a familiar place. The broad Farnsworth lawn was immaculate. The shrubs had been pruned, and the garden was flowering like crazy. Ann had loved the garden. But the deserted house gave me an eerie feeling. Like living next door to a well-manicured cemetery.

"Well, you can't let a place like

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that go to seed," I said, and tried to dismiss the whole thing. "Let's get the bags out and unpacked, Pam, or we'll never have the kids in bed."

We woke into the sunlight of a still June morning, and I was glad I was taking my month's vacation while the summer was fresh. We spent the morning working around the house and at noon we piled the kids into the station wagon and drove over to the yacht-club beach, where the summer colony gathers every day for a preluncheon swim and exchange of gossip.

Most of the families had just moved in, and we spent half an hour talking, enjoying the sense of fitting easily into a remembered way of life. Everything was fine until I looked up and saw that Helen and Rex Norton had just driven into the parking strip. "Don't look now," I muttered to Pamela, "but the Nortons are back."

Pam's mouth set almost primly. "I don't want to look," she said, "and after what happened I think the Nortons might have gone somewhere else this summer." She pulled on a bathing cap. "I'm going for a swim."

But you can't avoid people in a place like that, and when we came out of the water there they were, sitting on the beach. Rex jumped to his feet, greeted Pam, and then turned to shake hands with me. I said, "Hello, Rex," without much enthusiasm.

He was a handsome guy, a little too smooth for Gray's Neck, but maybe I was remembering what had happened the summer before. Pam was talking to Helen, and the sun was doing remarkable things with Helen's bright, coppery hair. She turned to me and held up a hand. "Hello, Charlie," she said. "Good thing you're back. The bass are really running in the Canal. How about coming down with us tonight?"

I was frankly shocked at the invitation and I said sharply, "We'll be busy around the house for a day or two." I looked at Pam. Her mouth had tightened again. "We'd better go back and have lunch, Charlie," she said. "I'll siphon the young out of the water."

Pamela exploded when I was helping her put lunch together a little later. "To see the Nortons you'd think nothing had happened between Rex and Ann," she said angrily. "You'd think they'd forgotten Ann died fishing from those damned rocks along the Canal."

She banged down a pan for emphasis, and I was trying to picture Ann Farnsworth's face when it was warm with life and alive with her dark beauty. Instead, I saw it bruised and stained with blood as she lay lifeless on the loose, tumbled rocks. Well, her death had solved one problem irrevocably: it had been a near thing between her and Rex Norton.

The Nortons had been newcom-

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ers to Gray's Neck the summer before, and some sort of electric spark had jumped between Ann and Rex when they met. I don't know about Rex but I got the impression Ann was rather shocked when she realized what was happening. She'd had a wonderful life with David Farnsworth in the ten years they'd been married. He was foreign sales director of a big Boston chemical company, and they traveled abroad a great deal.

But when Ann met Rex, some sort of powerful chemistry of her own started working that wasn't in David's books. The greatest evidence of the seriousness of the affair was that after a while no one mentioned it. The summer colony simply held its breath, watching.

It was brutal to be with Helen Norton as the summer wore on. Anyone could see that she was desperately in love with her husband. Dancing with her at the yacht-club parties I was conscious of her eyes straining toward the door where Rex disappeared with Ann. When they came back, Helen's hand gripped mine till it actually hurt. I felt sorry for her, but there was nothing anybody could do.

In a way, the whole thing came about because the Nortons were dedicated fishermen. They'd given a cocktail party early in the summer, and Rex had started talking about striped-bass fishing. "That's why Helen and I took this place," he said enthusiastically. "We've always fished the Jersey shore, but we heard so much about striper fishing in the Cape Cod Canal that we had to try it."

Ann was standing beside him. "I guess we don't make use of our opportunities," she said softly. "I've never gone striper fishing."

"We'll change all *that*," Rex said heartily, and Helen added, "It's the most marvelous fun, Ann. Come back and look at the tackle we've collected." She glanced over at me. "You're a fisherman, Charlie, aren't you? Come on."

I'd tried the Canal now and then but I'd never become dedicated the way real striper people are. I went along to a utility room at the back of their house and I've never seen as much gear as the Nortons had. There was a bench with a small vise which held a lure that Helen told us she was working on. "Rex and I make our own sinkers, too," she said, showing me a metal mold. "This is sort of—well, you might say the Norton trademark," she laughed, holding up a long, attenuated pyramid of lead. "The commercial types are so chunky they create wind resistance. Rex and I designed this to overcome it."

"You must be pretty good," I said.

Helen laughed again, and that remarkable coppery hair swung across her shoulders. "You have to be good if you want to take fish," she said. She'd had several martinis, and her eyes were overbright, but

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otherwise the drinks didn't show. "Rex and I practice casting a lot. The secret is to watch the stripers roll, figure where they're headed, and then put a lure right in front of their noses."

Rex said, "Ann, you've got to try it."

Ann looked up at him, and it seemed to me her eyes had gone soft and liquid. "Yes, I think I'll have to," she said thoughtfully.

The Norton's enthusiasm inspired the rest of us, and we fished the Canal two or three times a week all summer. That awful September night I was fishing about twenty-five yards to Ann's left. David was on the other side. Pamela was farther along, with Rex on her right. Helen hadn't gone down with us that night. She said she had a headache and was going to bed.

I had just taken a striper and was pulling out the hook when I saw David rush up the bank, race along the path at the top, and scramble down again. Then I saw Ann lying there and I was running, too—up the rocks to the path and down beside them. I reached for a wrist thrown out crazily beyond her face that was turned up to the moonlight. There was no pulse at all.

"She didn't even cry out!" David moaned. "I looked over, and she was lying here. Charlie, why didn't she cry out when she fell?"

I put my hand under his arm and lifted him up gently. "It wouldn't have mattered," I said. "You couldn't have done anything if you'd seen it happen."

Her skull had been fractured in three places, the autopsy showed. One puncture, deeper than the rest, had caused her death. The sharp points all over those rocks can be murder if you lose your balance . . .

This June the weather was perfect. Pam and I sailed a lot, we swam and played tennis, and the ghostly memory still stared at us from the house next door.

One Saturday the Nortons asked us for cocktails and, thinking of the Nortons, I got the urge to go fishing. I took down my surf rod. The ferrule had come loose over the winter, and I was sitting on the terrace sandpapering and cementing it back when Pam came out. I said, "I'm going down to the Canal and try for a striper. I don't suppose you'd like to come?"

Pamela shook her head firmly. "It makes me shiver just to think of teetering on those rocks trying to cast," she said, and put her hand on my arm. "*You* be careful, Charlie. I wish you wouldn't go alone."

"I'll be fine," I said. "I'm the sure-footed type—remember?"

"That's what everyone said about Ann," Pam murmured.

There weren't many cars on Route 6. I crossed the Bourne Bridge, rounded the traffic circle, and then straightened out on the road below the Canal. I turned in

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at the pine grove where we always parked, unclipped my rod from the roof of the station wagon, and walked across the railroad track to the path above the Canal bank.

A man was crouched on the rocks with his head down. He was looking for something and he was in the exact spot where Ann had been fishing that night last summer. Then, as he straightened up and got to his feet, holding something in his hand, I saw that it was David Farnsworth.

"David!" I called, starting along the path. "I thought you were in Europe," I said when he came up the bank.

He seemed excited and he paid no attention to my words. "Look, Charlie," he said, and held out his hand. "I found this under the rocks down there. Do you recognize it?"

I glanced at a familiar attenuated pyramid of lead and then back at his face, puzzled. "Why, sure," I said. "It's one of the Nortons' special sinkers. Rex or Helen must have dropped it."

David shook his head and pointed to the ring at the top. There was a swivel and snap attached and a foot of frayed line. "Would you please remember that you saw me find this, Charlie?" David asked. "I don't mean to be mysterious, but it's important. I'll see you later." He turned abruptly and hurried across the track.

Pam was dressing for the Nortons' party when I got back. I told her about seeing David and his strange behavior. Pamela looked over with her lipstick poised. "But what did he mean about the Nortons' sinker being so important?" she asked, and then she noticed her watch. "Hey, we ought to hurry," she said. "It's after six."

People were converging when we walked down the road to the Nortons' house. Rex was standing near the door. "I hear you went fishing this afternoon, Charlie," he said. "Catch anything?"

I shook my head, said I'd have a gin and tonic, and walked into the living room where people were milling about. Pam and I became separated, the way couples do at a party where you know everyone. I saw Helen sitting in a big chair across the room and walked over. Groups shifted, and presently Helen and I were alone, talking about which tides were more productive for fishing the Canal, when her voice stopped in the middle of a sentence and she said suddenly, "There's David Farnsworth. Why, I thought he was in Europe."

Everyone crowded around him, so it was a little while before he could work his way across the room to Helen. She held out her hand, but he was lighting a cigarette and seemed not to notice. "Rex and I would have asked you today if we'd known you were back," Helen said.

David took the drink Rex brought him. "Sorry, Rex. I didn't

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realize you were having a party," he said. "I've been in Russia, making a deal for some chemicals that aren't on the restricted list. It takes a little time to do business with the Russians, and while I waited I joined an Intourist flight to Central Asia. Are you listening, Helen?"

She seemed startled. "Of course. It must have been fascinating."

David was speaking in a flat monotone and his eyes never left Helen's face. "One night at dinner an old Russian told me how the Kirghiz tribesmen used to hunt wolves. Maybe they still do. It's quite interesting, Helen. They ride out on fast ponies with long whips of leather, weighted at the end with lead. They are so expert at casting them they can hit a wolf in the head every time. Of course the blow kills."

Helen's eyes were on him. "Why should that be of any interest to me?" she asked, but her voice was faint.

"Because that was pretty much the way you killed Ann, wasn't it?" he shot back. "With an expert cast of a surf rod?"

Helen half rose from the chair and then sank back as Rex spun David around. "Just what are you saying?" he demanded roughly. "Helen wasn't even at the Canal that night."

"I think she was," David said evenly. "She had complained of a headache and told us she wasn't going. But I think she drove down later. Everyone was intent on fishing, so she wasn't noticed, even with the bright moon. Helen boasts she can hit a five-inch target as far away as sixty yards—and I've seen her do it. Ann was only twenty yards below the path where Helen stood."

"You're mad!" Helen cried. "I was here, I tell you. I was here in bed when Rex came back and told me about—about Ann."

David swung around to her, and now his voice had the relentless bite of an executioner. "I imagine Rex asked you that evening to divorce him so he could marry Ann," he said. "Ann told me—just after dinner. I'd been expecting it. You must have been, too—but you couldn't let it happen, could you, Helen? You were determined not to let Rex go."

With a convulsive sob she leaned forward and held her head in her hands. I saw a look of horror spread over Rex's face. He turned to David. "You can't make a wild charge like that without evidence," he blustered, but you could see how shaken he was.

"I've got evidence," David said grimly. He nodded at me. "Charlie saw the sinker I found in a crevice of the rocks where Ann was fishing. It dropped there after it killed her—the Norton trademark. When Helen tried to reel back, it must have caught, and her line broke. I took the sinker to the police this afternoon. I asked them to match its

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point with the diagrams and photographs they made of the skull puncture that killed Ann." He paused for a moment and then he said, "I always thought it was queer that Ann didn't cry out as she fell. Now I know why. . . . She was dead."

I looked down at Helen. Lights from a west window played with the coppery hair, dancing with her shattering sobs. David turned, set down his glass, and walked out of the house. I found Pamela, and when we left with the others I glanced back at Rex. He was leaning against the mantel, his shoulders slumped.

Pamela gripped my hand hard as we walked up the road. Neither of us spoke. There was simply nothing to say. But I was thinking what a roundabout path Fate sometimes takes to track down murder.

NEXT MONTH . . .

FRANCES & RICHARD LOCKRIDGE's	*The Scent of Murder*
HUGH PENTECOST's	*Hector Is Willin'*
PATRICIA HIGHSMITH's	*The Thrill Seeker*
MURIEL RUKEYSER's	*The Club*
GORDON GASKILL's	*Murder in the Mistral*

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**ARTHUR C. CLARKE**
TITLE:	***Crime on Mars***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Inspector Rawlings
LOCALE:	Meridian City, Mars
COMMENTS:	*The Martian equivalent of stealing the Mona Lisa from the Louvre! Crime plus detection plus science fiction by one of the leading science fiction writers of our time . . .*

"We don't have much crime on Mars," said Detective-Inspector Rawlings, a little sadly. "In fact, that's the chief reason I'm going back to the Yard. If I stayed here much longer, I'd get completely out of practice."

We were sitting in the main observation lounge of the Phobos Spaceport, looking out across the jagged sun-drenched crags of the tiny moon. The ferry rocket that had brought us up from Mars had left ten minutes ago and was now beginning the long fall back to the ochre-tinted globe hanging there against the stars. In half an hour we would be boarding the liner for Earth—a world on which most of the passengers had never set foot, but which they still called "home."

"At the same time," continued the Inspector, "now and then there's a case that makes life interesting. You're an art dealer, Mr. Maccar; I'm sure you heard about that spot of bother at Meridian City a couple of months ago."

"I don't think so," replied the plump, olive-skinned little man I'd taken for just another returning tourist. Presumably the Inspector had already checked through the passenger list; I wondered how much he knew about me, and tried to reassure myself that my conscience was—well, reasonably clear. After all, everybody took *something* out through Martian Customs—

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"It's been rather well hushed up," said the Inspector, "but you can't keep these things quiet for long. Anyway, a jewel thief from Earth tried to steal Meridian Museum's greatest treasure—the Siren Goddess."

"But that's absurd!" I objected. "It's priceless, of course—but it's only a lump of sandstone. You couldn't sell it to anyone—you might just as well steal the Mona Lisa."

The Inspector grinned, rather mirthlessly. "*That's* happened too," he said. "Maybe the motive was the same. There are collectors who would give a fortune for such an object, even if they could only look at it themselves. Don't you agree, Mr. Maccar?"

"That's perfectly true," said the art dealer. "In my business you meet all sorts of crazy people."

"Well, this chappie—name's Danny Weaver—had been well paid by one of them. And if it hadn't been for a piece of fantastically bad luck, he might have brought it off."

The Spaceport P.A. system apologized for a further slight delay owing to final fuel checks, and asked a number of passengers to report to Information. While we were waiting for the announcement to finish, I recalled what little I knew about the Siren Goddess. Although I'd never seen the original, like most other departing tourists I had a replica in my baggage. It bore the certificate of the Mars Bureau of Antiquities, guaranteeing that "this full-scale reproduction is an exact copy of the so-called Siren Goddess, discovered in the Mare Sirenium by the Third Expedition, A.D. 2012 (A.M. 23)."

It's quite a tiny thing to have caused so much controversy, Only eight or nine inches high—you wouldn't look at it twice if you saw it in a museum on Earth. The head of a young woman, with slightly oriental features, elongated earlobes, hair curled in tight ringlets close to the scalp, lips half parted in an expression of pleasure or surprise—and that's all.

But it's an enigma so baffling that it has inspired a hundred religious sects, and driven quite a few archeologists out of their minds. For a perfectly human head has no right whatsoever to be found on Mars, whose only intelligent inhabitants were crustaceans—"educated lobsters," as the newspapers are fond of calling them. The aboriginal Martians never came near to achieving space-flight, and in any event their civilization died before men existed on Earth.

No wonder the Goddess is the Solar System's Number One mystery. I don't suppose we'll find the answer in my lifetime—if we ever do.

"Danny's plan was beautifully simple," continued the Inspector. "You know how absolutely dead a Martian city gets on Sunday, when

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everything closes down and the colonists stay home to watch the TV from Earth. Danny was counting on this when he checked into the hotel in Meridian West, late Friday afternoon. He'd have Saturday for reconnoitering the Museum, an undisturbed Sunday for the job itself, and on Monday morning he'd be just another tourist leaving town . . .

"Early Saturday he strolled through the little park and crossed over into Meridian East, where the Museum stands. In case you don't know, the city gets its name because it's exactly on longitude 180 degrees; there's a big stone slab in the park with the Prime Meridian engraved on it, so that visitors can get themselves photographed standing in two hemispheres at once. Amazing what simple things amuse some people.

"Danny spent the day going over the Museum, exactly like any other tourist determined to get his money's worth. But at closing time he didn't leave; he'd holed up in one of the galleries not open to the public, where the museum had been arranging a Late Canal Period reconstruction but had run out of money before the job could be finished. He stayed there until about midnight, just in case there were any enthusiastic researchers still in the building. Then he emerged and got to work."

"Just a minute," I interrupted. "What about the night watchman?"

"My dear chap! They don't have such luxuries on Mars. There weren't even any burglar alarms, for who would bother to steal lumps of stone? True, the Goddess was sealed up neatly in a strong glass and metal cabinet, just in case some souvenir hunter took a fancy to her. But even if she were stolen, there was nowhere the thief could hide, and of course all outgoing traffic would be searched as soon as the statue was missed."

That was true enough. I'd been thinking in terms of Earth, forgetting that every city on Mars is a closed little world of its own beneath the force-field that protects it from the freezing near-vaccum. Beyond those electronic shields is the utterly hostile emptiness of the Martian Outback, where a man will die in seconds without protection. That makes law enforcement very easy; no wonder there's so little crime on Mars . . .

"Danny had a beautiful set of tools, as specialized as a watchmaker's. The main item was a microsaw no bigger than a soldering iron; it had a wafer-thin blade, driven at a million cycles a second by an ultrasonic power-pack. It would go through glass or metal like butter—and leave a cut only about as thick as a hair. Which was very important for Danny, as he could not leave any traces of his handiwork.

"I suppose you've guessed how he intended to operate. He was go-

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ing to cut through the base of the cabinet and substitute one of those souvenir replicas for the genuine Goddess. It might be a couple of years before some inquisitive expert discovered the awful truth, and long before then the original would have taken to Earth, perfectly disguised as a copy of itself, with a genuine certificate of authenticity. Pretty neat, eh?

"It must have been a weird business, working in that darkened gallery with all those million-year-old carvings and unexplainable artifacts around him. A museum on Earth is bad enough at night, but at least it's—well, *human*. And Gallery Three, which houses the Goddess, is particularly unsettling. It's full of bas-reliefs showing quite incredible animals fighting each other; they look rather like giant beetles, and most paleontologists flatly deny that they could ever have existed. But imaginary or not, they belonged to this world, and they didn't disturb Danny as much as the Goddess, staring at him across the ages and defying him to explain her presence here. She gave him the creeps. How do I know? He told me.

"Danny set to work on that cabinet as carefully as any diamond-cutter preparing to cleave a gem. It took most of the night to slice out the trap door, and it was nearly dawn when he relaxed and put down the saw. There was still a lot of work to do, but the hardest part was over. Putting the replica into the case, checking its appearance against the photos he'd thoughtfully brought with him, and covering up his traces might take a good part of Sunday, but that didn't worry him in the least. He had another twenty-four hours, and would positively welcome Monday's first visitors so that he could mingle with them and make his inconspicuous exit.

"It was a perfectly horrible shock to his nervous system, therefore, when the main doors were noisily unbarred at eight thirty and the museum staff—all six of them—started to open up for the day. Danny bolted for the emergency exit, leaving everything behind—tools, Goddesses, the lot.

"He had another big surprise when he found himself in the street: it should have been completely deserted at this time of day, with everyone at home reading the Sunday papers. But here were the citizens of Meridian East, as large as life, heading for plant or office on what was obviously a normal working day.

"By the time poor Danny got back to his hotel we were waiting for him. We couldn't claim much credit for deducing that only a visitor from Earth—and a very recent one at that—could have overlooked Meridian City's chief claim to fame. And I presume you know what *that* is."

"Frankly, I don't," I answered.

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"You can't see much of Mars in six weeks, and I never went east of the Syrtis Major."

"Well, it's absurdly simple, but we shouldn't be too hard on Danny—even the locals occasionally fall into the same trap. It's something that doesn't bother us on Earth, where we've been able to dump the problem in the Pacific Ocean. But Mars, of course, is all dry land; and that means that *somebody* is forced to live with the International Date Line . . .

"Danny, you see, had planned the job from Meridian West. It was Sunday over there all right—and it was still Sunday there when we picked him up at the hotel. But over in Meridian East, half a mile away, it was only Saturday. That little trip across the park had made all the difference! I told you it was rotten luck."

There was a long moment of silent sympathy, then I asked, "What did he get?"

"Three years," said Inspector Rawlings.

"That doesn't seem very much."

"Mars years—that makes it almost six of ours. And a whopping fine which, by an odd coincidence, came to exactly the refund value of his return ticket to Earth. He isn't in jail, of course—Mars can't afford that kind of nonproductive luxury. Danny has to work for a living, under discreet surveillance. I told you that the Meridian Museum couldn't afford a night watchman. Well, it has one now. Guess who?"

"All passengers prepare to board in ten minutes! Please collect your hand-baggage!" ordered the loudspeakers.

As we started to move toward the airlock, I couldn't help asking one more question.

"What about the people who put Danny up to it? There must have been a lot of money behind him. Did you get them?"

"Not yet; they'd covered their tracks pretty thoroughly, and I believe Danny was telling the truth when he said he couldn't give us a lead. Still, it's not my case. As I told you, I'm going back to my old job at the Yard. But a policeman always keeps his eyes open—like an art dealer, eh, Mr. Maccar? Why, you look a bit green about the gills. Have one of my space-sickness tablets."

"No, thank you," answered Mr. Maccar, "I'm quite all right."

His tone was distinctly unfriendly; the social temperature seemed to have dropped below zero in the last few minutes. I looked at Mr. Maccar, and I looked at the Inspector. And suddenly I realized that we were going to have a very interesting trip.

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IN THE COURSE OF JUSTICE

by PHILIP MacDONALD

(continued from page 82)

The afternoon sunlight was still flooding the hospital room. But it wasn't a cold yellow glare any more. It was warm and golden as Anna leaned forward and laid her hand on his forehead again, cool and strong and warm. And then her lips.

She said, "How many times must I tell you, Nikky—there is now nothing to trouble you. You must believe this!"

He smiled up at her. But the smile faded as memory of the big man in uniform came back. He started to say something, but it was in Hungarian, and she laid a finger on his lips and looked toward the open door, through which he could see the other one, the young one with the blond hair.

She said, "You must speak in English, Nikolas. Or it will be thought we are saying things which are secret." She laughed softly. "Better, do not speak at all. Be still, as the doctor commands."

He was nearly convinced. But his head felt large and aching and light, and it was hard to remember. He said, "Tell me again what it is which happens."

His hands were lying outside the covers, and she took them in her hands. She said slowly, "We have a new friend. New friends. They have discovered a thing which proves that this—this little *hundin* is making nothing but lies. That in the auto she was not so much as sitting on the same seat with you." Her hands tightened their grip. "You understand? Our friends are now with the police. By this time they have made the explanation—"

He stopped her. He said, "Yes, yes. I remember." He smiled and let his head rest deeper on the pillows. He did remember. Everything she had told him. And something else also. Something from before. Something about the child . . .

He groped for it. "The child, Anna . . . I have told you of her talent? A great actress in embryo—" He broke off as memory came flooding back. He said, "Ah, yes! I know *why* she has made these lies about me. There is someone who has told her—she herself told this to me!—someone who has told her that to begin a career it is good for her to be somehow in the newspapers—"

He stopped again, this time because a bayonet of pain had stabbed through his head. He groaned, and closed his eyes. And as if this has been a cue, the nurse came into the room. He heard her talking in a low voice, and then, as he opened his eyes, Anna bent over him, kissed him, and said softly, "Rest

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now. I must not stay, but I will not be far." Her hand touched his cheek. "And remember: there is nothing to trouble you."

Nikolas Bethlen smiled up at his wife. His eyes closed again, and he slept.

Two minutes later, Maggie Gray entered the hospital lobby from the street and was crossing toward the stairs when the elevator came down and Anna Bethlen stepped out of it. She was smiling, but the smile died as she saw Maggie's face and allowed herself to be led to an alcove out of sight of the desk. She said sharply, "What is it. What has happened?"

"It's not good." Maggie was somber, and with no bush-beating she gave a succinct report of Miss Barbara Clark's latest move. She said, "so I slipped out. To tell you before you came over." She was adding, "That child scares me—" when she was interrupted.

Three short, savage words in her native tongue had burst from Anna. Her voice was low, but it vibrated with pent-up fury—a fury which also blazed from the great dark eyes. She said, "And a great actress, too, I am told!"

Then, almost as she spoke, the fury seemed to die away and was replaced by something else. A realization—an idea—.

"Actress," she repeated slowly, softly. Then again, "Actress . . ."

In Erhardt's office, Mike sat slumped on the window sill, staring down at the floor. Behind the desk, Erhardt grunted monosyllabic replies to a telephone call he'd just received. On her straight-backed chair, the girl seemed hardly to have moved since she had first sat down.

Erhardt hung up. He said to the girl, "The Hollywood police contacted your cousin, honey. She's flyin' up to get you. Okay?" Now the man was truly genial, truly sympathetic. There was no mistaking his tone, nor his look.

Impossibly, Mike's heart sank even lower. This was a fine end to his essay in knight-errantry. Galahad disarmed, unhorsed, ignominiously defeated! . . . He wondered where Maggie had gone, and then realized she must be with Anna Bethlen. He winced from thought of the Bethlens and tried to concentrate on his conqueror.

She was smiling at Erhardt. An artistically tremulous smile, damn her! And Erhardt—the hell with him too!—Erhardt was telling her she didn't have to hang around any more; she could go rest up at Mrs. Jensen's.

Mike watched them as Erhardt went to the door, and the girl stood up and followed him. She must be more rattled than she looked, he decided, becaue she made no move to get her coat, and she left the big purse standing on the desk.

Erhardt opened the door—and straightened up, staring in surprise at someone Mike couldn't see.

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Maggie. She appeared on the other side of the doorway, coming around Rodzinski's desk. She looked strained, Mike thought, and tired. She said, "Oh, Bob, I was just asking the Sergeant if you could talk with Mrs. Beth—Mrs. Brandt. I know you will."

Erhardt said, "Now look, Maggie—" and then stopped short as Anna Bethlen came up to the door.

"You are Captain Erhardt?" she said. "I wish you will give me information, if you please."

Mike was amazed. He didn't recognize the voice, and for one stunned instant he hardly knew the woman. She moved differently; she seemed a couple of inches taller; the warmth of her had somehow been replaced by a cold, incisive forcefulness.

He found himself on his feet. As well as astonishment, he felt an extraordinary, reasonless excitement. He missed Erhardt's reply and something else the new Anna said. But it didn't matter, because Erhardt stepped back and she swept into the room, Maggie at her heels.

For a moment the shabby little office seemed to be full of untidy, milling movement—Maggie closing the door, Erhardt crossing to stand behind his desk, Anna moving forward, and Barbara Clark backing away from her. Maggie nearly colliding with Anna's back and then stumbling against the corner of the desk, dislodging Barbara's big purse and picking it up again. Barbara, unable to go back any farther, edging along the wall as far as the clumsy old safe . . .

Then all at once everything stopped—and a pattern formed. Erhardt and Maggie at the desk, with Anna in front of it. And behind her, in the corner, Barbara Clark.

Just a bunch of people sorting themselves out, Mike thought. But the feeling of excitement persisted. He couldn't take his eyes off Anna Bethlen.

She said to Erhardt, "The information I wish, Captain—it is about the property of my husband. The—the belongings he has with him at the time of the accident." She moved closer to the desk. "He is troubled about this. And I too."

Erhardt said, "Nothin' to worry about, ma'am." The last word came out reluctantly. He pointed to the safe. "It's all in there. Typewriter—notebooks—everything."

"That is good," she said. It was extraordinary how tall she seemed. "But what is important are the belongings from himself. From the pockets."

Erhardt pointed to the safe again. "All in there too." He paused. "You want to see,"

She said, "If you please," and stood motionless, her fingertips resting on the desk top as he lumbered across to the safe. Watching her, Mike held his breath.

The safe door groaned, and in a moment Erhardt was back at the desk, a big manila envelope in his

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hand. He unclipped the flap and tipped out onto the blotter a heterogeneous collection, topped by a bulky wallet of worn black leather, which might have come from the pockets of any nine men out of ten.

Looking down at the things, Anna Bethlen drew in her breath with a little hissing sound—a sound which seemed to suppress every other sound in the room. She lifted her head, and looked at Erhardt.

She said, "There is something which is not here. Another—what is your word, another wallet." She pointed to the one on the blotter. "More small than this, of a brown color. On the inner side are the letters N and B." Now she touched the black wallet with a finger. "In this are few dollars only. For low expenditures. But in the other were many. More than nine hundred."

Erhardt scowled. "What's here is all that was on him," he said. The tone was ugly, his heavy jaw was jutting.

Anna looked at him with cold serenity. "I know this is as you say, Captain. I do not suggest any other thing. But also it is *sure* that my husband has the money when he starts upon the journey this morning." Her eyes held Erhardt's. "There are other persons also who know this. Persons who are of reputation."

Mike groaned inwardly, the excitement in him turning to dismay. He saw now what she was trying to do. But it seemed all too plain that she couldn't get away with it, that she might cause even more trouble for the Bethlens than they had already.

Then Erhardt growled something he didn't catch, but he saw the man's scowl had been replaced by a puzzled frown. And Anna was talking again.

She was saying, "You may not understand, Captain. But to myself it is most clear." She was turning, slowly. It was impossible to take one's eyes off her. For the first time she looked directly at Barbara Clark. She said, "This—this little *zauberin,* she has stolen the money. She has—how do you say it?—picked the pocket of my husband." The words were steady and spaced, each one an icy knife. "And she is *most* clever. To remove suspicion, to make herself the ill-used one certain to be believed, she says these lies about him. These filthy lies."

She stopped, turning her back to the girl and facing Erhardt again. There was a moment of heavy shocked silence, then a sudden high-pitched outburst from the corner:

"I didn't! I didn't steal anything! She's a crazy woman!" The girl was staring across at Erhardt. All the color had drained from her face, and her eyes were wide and bewildered and fearful.

Erhardt said, "Take it easy, Barbara." But he didn't look at her.

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He looked at Anna; her performance was having its effect. He said, "Let's get this straight, ma'am. You got evidence to back up what you say?"

"*Evidence!*" Anna's eyes blazed, and she flung out a hand to point at the girl. "Somewhere in her belongings you will find the money itself!"

"She's crazy, Mr. Erhardt! Make her stop! Make her lay off me!" The voice was steadier now, though the young face was still chalk-white.

Anna swept on, "When my husband is accused, you take his belongings. So now you must take the belongings of the person *I* accuse. And search in them." Her palm slapped down on the desk top. "Search in them, I say!"

Erhardt looked at her for a long moment. He seemed to be making up his mind. "There's a suitcase outside," he said slowly. "And I guess this is hers." He reached out to the corner of the desk, picked up the purse, and flipped it open.

He thrust in a rummaging hand —and an extraordinary expression came over his heavy face. Slowly, holding it by the edges, he pulled out of the purse a billfold of brown leather, thick with money, a billfold which as he opened it showed the initials N.B. stamped on the inside.

And Mike suddenly remembered that half-seen stumble of Maggie's, when she had knocked the purse off the desk and picked it up again . . .

Anna Bethlen was motionless, her gaze fixed on Erhardt's face. She said, "You see, Captain?" But this time he didn't look at her. He was staring at Barbara Clark, his eyes hard, his mouth a thin line.

He said, "Well—what's the story this time?"

The girl came suddenly to life. Violent life. She had been frozen with fear and astonishment; now only the fear was left. She came across the room in a rush. Right up to Erhardt, her hands clutching at his arm. She was breathing as if she had run for a mile.

"I didn't take it—you've got to believe me—I didn't take it!" The words poured out. "I *couldn't* have taken it—I wasn't near him! I was in the back seat, all the time. What I told you before—that wasn't true. I—I—made it up. I didn't mean—I didn't—"

She couldn't go on. The strength seemed to go out of her. She covered her face with her hands.

Cold and dark Anna's eyes flicked one glance at her, then came back to Erhardt's face. "You are satisfied, Captain?" she said.

"Certainly am." Erhardt was grim. He pointed to the billfold, lying open on the desk. "You realize I'll have to hold this, ma'am?" he said. "For evidence."

He was going to say more, but she stopped him. "Please," she said. "One moment."

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She looked at the girl. "Well, Barbara? Do you find it pleasant to be accused with lies? Lies which are believed? Lies which can harm you for always?"

The girl's hands dropped to her sides. She stared, the vivid blue eyes wild and only half comprehending. Her lips moved, but no sound came.

In sudden fury Erhardt crashed a huge fist on the desk top. "What the hell goes on *now?*" he demanded—and from the background Maggie crossed quickly to him. She put a hand on his arm and said, "Wait, Bob, I'll explain—" and drew him aside.

Anna and the girl faced each other, not moving, not speaking.

Mike, watching fascinated, saw a miracle of transformation—from acting role back to true self—come over the woman. The real Anna Bethlen again, she moved closer to the girl. She looked down at the white, anguished little face and gently put an arm around the slim body.

Burying her face in the proffered shoulder, Barbara Clark burst into tears.

There were interesting headlines for San Francisco's breakfast the next morning. They blazoned the finding, by a member of the *Sun* staff, of Nikolas Bethlen who, it seemed, had met with a car accident while driving alone near Yosemite.

There were headlines, too, in the *Logwood City Courier*. They referred to the *Sun's* sensational discovery and also trumpeted the *Courier's* own exclusive—an interview with Mrs. Nikolas Bethlen, better known to the world as Anna Konrad, often called the Hungarian Bernhardt.

Mike Hackett read the interview the same evening, as he sat at dinner with the *Courier's* editor-owner. He said suddenly, "Hey, what's this?" and read aloud, "'Miss Konrad also gave our representative a thrilling piece of theatrical news. It seems that, since her arrival in America, she has discovered a young actress of tremendous promise, and will personally supervise her training and eventual debut.'"

He stared across the table at Maggie. "Does she *mean* this?" he said incredulously.

"Of *course* she does!" said Maggie, and then, "That, my friend, is a wonderful woman!"

"Yes yes, indeed." Mike looked at her for a long moment, then raised his glass.

"Logwood City," he said, "seems to be full of 'em."

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The Best Crime Story of the Year

Gerald Kersh's "The Thief Who Played Dead" first appeared in the February 13, 1954 issue of "The Saturday Evening Post." Checking back on the annual awards made for the best detective-crime-mystery short story of 1954, we discovered that "The Thief Who Played Dead" seemed to have been completely ignored. For example, Mystery Writers of America did not even nominate the Gerald Kersh story—so it was neither winner nor runner-up for the short-story "Edgar" of 1954. For another example, David C. Cooke failed to include the story, or even to mention it, in his anthology, THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR, *covering stories published in 1954.*

Surely there must be a moral lesson in these simple facts—something to do, no doubt, with the fallibility of annual awards and the impossibility of judging the so-called "best," especially in our own time; for in our humble opinion Gerald Kersh's "The Thief Who Played Dead" was the finest crime short story of its year, and "The Saturday Evening Post" deserved honor and acclaim for its publication.

It is therefore a greater pleasure than usual to be able to bring you Queen's Number One Short Story Selection for 1954—a story that took rare imagination on the part of the author to conceive and incredible courage to write—a story that, considering its unbelievably high aim, came off with magnificent success—a story, in short, of "the most audacious and spectacular robbery of all time."

THE THIEF WHO PLAYED DEAD

by GERALD KERSH

KARMESIN'S MUSTACHE HAS ALways fascinated me. It is full of zoological interest; it appears to live a life of its own. When I first met him twenty-five years ago, it resembled a hibernating squirrel. Ten years later it had turned into a dying raccoon. And now it was a gray-backed gull seeking refuge from a storm under the jutting crag of his formidable nose, so that, as his cigarette burned down low, I half expected it to fly away with a terrified squawk. But he rescued

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it in the nick of time, dropped the glowing stub into the dregs of his coffee cup, and gave it a reassuring pat.

He caught my glance—Karmesin missed nothing—and said, "Yes, old boy, it has gone white. It grew out white after I shaved it off in 1923."

"For a disguise?" I asked.

"Well, to lay the foundations for one. Ah, that was an affair! The world has never seen the like of it, and never will again!"

Now, Karmesin is an enigma. In all the years I have known him, I have never been able to decide whether he is the greatest criminal or the greatest liar the world has ever known. Either way, he is great. He has his facts at his fingertips—the unlikeliest facts. He never contradicts himself, and when he falls into a reminiscent mood, he casts such a spell upon you by a kind of sleight-of-mind that, while he talks, you must believe. He is the conjurer and you the child at the party when, in the dimmed light, the bowl of goldfish comes out of the hat. And you go away saying to yourself, *It must be a lie. Or was it?*

"Tell me about it," I said.

With heavy sarcasm he said, "There is no earthly use telling you anything. You never believe me. You are one of those fools who call themselves 'skeptics,' and 'hard-headed,' et cetera, et cetera. And what fools you turn out to be in your unbelief! You will believe in Signor Ponzi's fairy gold or Ivar Kreuger's mad promises far more sincerely than you believe in God. That is why the easiest money I have ever made has been by picking out the shrewdest skeptic I could find and selling him for hard cash that which did not even exist."

"Oh, Karmesin!" I begged.

"I will tell you, briefly," said Karmesin, with a chuckle, "just in order to shock you."

. . . I am that rare combination, a thinker and a man of action. Therefore, it has been possible for me, in the course of a long life devoted almost exclusively to robbery in most of its forms, to conceive and execute some of the most sensational coups in the history of crime. But what I am going to tell you constitutes the history of, perhaps, the most audacious and spectacular robbery of all time.

It also involves a discovery which, if published, would shake the world. It would drive news of a world catastrophe onto Page 3. And as for the loot—well, the man who had that in his pocket—if he had come by it honestly—could command anything. Magnates would cry for it; nations would bid for it; treasuries would be ransacked for the purchase of it—if it had been honestly come by.

Even now hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, would be paid for the return of it—if only

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one knew where to find it. And believe me, it is hard to find, because it is nothing but a tattered scrap of half-rotten vellum that you could cover with one hand, scribbled with seventy-five broken words on one side and some crabbed dog Latin on the other; cut, no doubt, out of a very ancient legal document. I was paid $2,000,000 for stealing it.

You want to know who paid me $2,000,000 and for exactly what? Aha, my boy, here we come to the privileged classes, the higher-ups! I may not mention real names for fear you might repeat them to your own destruction—for I, most certainly, on inquiry should deny all knowledge of this affair. There are, as you must know, dynasties of dollars: Hamburger II, Limburger IV, Van Elbow VI, and so on. All right, my pay came from a hereditary magnate of the third generation whom I will call Mr. Three.

His grandfather, Mr. Three No. I, was a species of Doctor Moriarty of high finance—a sort of arachnid in a tenuous web. He begot a son, who was the worst of the lot, and so the fortune descended to Mr. Three. Now there—God save the queen!—there was a strange one. Although he had been brought up to great expectations, he had been grudgingly shoved through college until, having acquired a master's degree in the arts, he became a teacher. Brother, I have studied under hard masters, but the Lord preserve me from such a one as Three III must have been! I have some little experience of him. He was a spy, a watcher by night, a pedant of the most learned sort. There was no way of having Mr. Three.

I was introduced to him by a man named Sweetbread, and this man was, in his way, one of the most sinister characters I have ever encountered . . .

Let me put it to you this way: Are you afraid of a machine gun, a shotgun, a bomb? Of course not. But might you not be afraid, let us say, of poison? You know? A little something here, a little something there. So that you begin to wonder whether a hypodermic has not been insinuated into your egg or curare put on a nail in the sole of your boot? Come now, surely, in the course of your professional experience, you have met dangerous men whose presence—even if you could not see them—induced a tingling sensation where the neck joins the shoulders?

Sweetbread was like this, and he was agent for Mr. Three.

But before I go on, a word—only one word—about Mr. Three. I mean, a thumbnail sketch. He had $100,000,000, but lived at the rate of about $12 a week in a brownstone house that might have been magnificent if he had kept it clean. His forbears had come out of goodness knows where and made heaven knows what shifts to get his

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millions. How do we put this? thus: his grandfather, acquisitive, and having the wherewithal to acquire, sowed the seed. His father, having learned the old man's lesson and inherited the old man's fortune, held on hard.

Aha! Watch here, young friend, the dreadful vanity of the inheritor of a great fortune who decides that he needs nothing. Take the example of Mr. Three, who was above all want, yet wanted everything.

He did not smoke. For him tobacco was dust and ashes, catarrh and halitosis—and so many dollars chucked into ashtrays. Mr. Three III, with simpering arrogance, said that he had no money to burn—which was his idea of humor.

Alcohol he abhorred, clothes he regarded as vanity; he went about shabby as only a multimillionaire dare afford to be. As for women, Mr. Three III was afraid of them, because one of his spiritual pastors and masters had assured him they were unhygienic.

Mr. Three III, born a millionaire and a miser, became a collector. It is the same thing, in effect. As a numismatist collects gold coins because they are old or recherché, so any other kind of collector, turning specie into the worth of it, gathers and grasps, whether it be metal, stone or—which is most valuable—paper in the form of books, etchings, stamps, and whatnot.

In point of fact, these wretches of collectors are worse than penurious. Your common or garden-variety miser grabs hard cash and holds it until God strikes him dead. He deals only in dirty money. But your collector of the fine arts makes blind alleys into which run the works of great men. Be advised by me: never collect property, not even a stamp. That way leads to the uttermost depths.

There is a costiveness about collectors which, in principle, I loathe. Yet, speaking professionally now, I have always found that my spirit clung to these same one-man museums. They are the easiest prey in the world. I could always rob such types with an easy conscience.

However, much as I hated and despised Mr. Three III for his vile greed, I detested Sweetbread even more. An avaricious millionaire I always regarded as fair game. Sweetbread knew this, for we were not unacquainted with each other. He was one of those sinister characters who operate in the underworld of the fine arts.

You may, or may not, know that art has its underworld, deep and dark and dangerous as the race track. Remind me, sometime, to tell you how I stole the Mona Lisa from the Louvre. This Sweetbread was an M.A., an Oxford man; something of a lecturer, a bit of a critic, an eccentric. There was something wrong with his eyes, so that God's daylight bothered him, and he wore black glasses. Oh, what a repulsive man he was, with his green-

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ish fish-belly face, and his horrid liver-colored mouth that was never quite wet or dry and made a tiny, sticky, smacking sound every time it opened. Yet a scholar, mark you—a man of erudition!

Tortuous in his way, serpentine in his means, armed with one of the best brains in England, Sweetbread went in pursuit of that which was out of the way. He loved the by-passes, the queer back-doubles, —the dank alleys and the rat-ridden cellars of the arts: he was a devotee of the unlikely. Sweetbread had a perverse love of the curious; a clammy passion, a grave-robber's love for what lay buried; a desire to disturb that which was supposed to be at rest. A burke-and-hare of a man, he would rather have taken a shilling by twilight than a pound by daylight. Not a savory type.

Now one evening he came to me and said, "M. Karmesin, would you be interested in a million dollars or so?"

"Perhaps," I said.

"I have a billionaire," said Sweetbread, "ripe for a bite."

"Oh?"

"It is legitimate," Sweetbread said, using sporting jargon, which came unpleasantly out of his mouth. "Play or pay. Deliver or nothing. You understand? Only out of the grand total, I must have one quarter, which might run as high as two hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"Aie, aie, aie!" I said. "Here, in effect, is a bite!"

"Indeed," said Sweetbread. "The bite of bites!"

"Relieve yourself, or make room," I said.

"Better meet my principal," said Sweetbread.

And so I did, and what a dreary fellow Mr. Three III was! Let us not indulge in character studies. A pig is not called a pig without reason. Enough. Mr. Three III was what young people now call a "creep"—at once too young for his age and too old for his years.

He said to Sweetbread, "You have no doubt explained the matter to this gentleman?"

"No, Mr. Three, I have not," said Sweetbread. "Not without your permission. It is a delicate matter."

"Then I will thank you kindly to explain," said Mr. Three.

At this point Sweetbread became academic. He gave me an interesting mixture of fact and conjecture, the gist of which was as follows:

The poet Edmund Spenser died in 1599 and was buried in Westminster Abbey. Now as far as I am concerned, the author of *The Faerie Queene* is one of the most ponderous and prodigious bores in Elizabethan literature. Yet he earned the affection of his queen, and therefore received certain outward signs of respect from his betters. So, when Edmund Spenser died there was a show of grief. When he was buried, the greatest

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of his contemporaries wrote poems to throw into his grave. Among these were the following: two minor poets, one named Hugh Roberts and the other John Shortland. I do not know with what effusions they scattered the grave of poor Edmund Spenser. I do not care. But there were were other poet present.

And when I give you their names you will observe that in the grave of Edmund Spenser were buried manuscripts more precious than the Code Sinaiticus, the price of which —a hundred thousand pounds— would, in comparison, have been a flea bite.

Sweetbread had the entire matter at his fingertips. Brushing lightly over the nonentities, Shortland and Roberts, he came to the business of the other mourners. There were present Michael Drayton, John Donne, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare. Every one of these great Elizabethans cast into Spenser's grave a poem specially written for the occasion of his burial.

William Shakespeare was thirty-five years old at the time, and engaged upon a potboiler entitled *Much Ado About Nothing*. It happens to us all: you have written for popular magazines; I have robbed a gas meter. Necessity is more than the mother of invention—she teaches you your place in the world.

Shakespeare was writing *Much Ado About Nothing*, I say. He was then in what Sweetbread called the Second Period, during which, writing the most unmitigated corn—as I believe you call it—for the actors, his mind was occupied with truly great work. Shakespeare was fussing and fretting with his nonsense. Observe the impatience of some of the titles: *Twelfth Night, or What You Will.* This is as much as to say: *Slice It Which Way You Like, It Is Still Baloney*. Then, again: *As You Like It.* This, surely, is as much as to say: *You Want It Like This? O.K.!*

There is show business for you: eat dirt, pander to temperamental clowns, murder your pet lambs—so long as Burbage has a speech and his young friend a part. Thus, you may get the wherewithal to write *Hamlet*—and even that will be sneered at as a rewrite job. But true genius cannot be kept down. Some Elizabethan version of a Hollywood producer says to you: "Listen, Bill. King James I is on the throne. He's a Scotsman, and doesn't like witches. I want you should write me a script about Scotsmen and witches." You write *Macbeth*. Only mediocrity is temperamental. True genius is divinely patient, devilishly pigheaded, and formidably adaptable.

So: with the best of his talent fermenting, Shakespeare must sit down and scribble the hack job, *Much Ado About Nothing*—in the middle of which Edmund Spenser has to come home from Ireland and die. Sweetbread said that, ac-

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cording to his conjecture, it was Michael Drayton—a gentle, sentimental little busybody of a minor poet—who went bustling about London, collaring the greatest literary figures of the time and, with womanish persistence, nagging and worrying them away from their business until they wrote mourning verses to be dropped with a decent show of grief into old Edmund Spenser's coffin.

That the poets I have mentioned finally did so is historical fact. I fancy that the eager beaver, Michael Drayton, got at Ben Jonson first, in The Mermaid Tavern, and, having mellowed him with a double quart of sherry, talked him into promising to write a few lines.

Then, in the time-honored manner of such well-meaning but persistent pests, he went to Shakespeare and said, in effect, "I hope I am not disturbing you, Will, but Ben has pledged his word to write a bit of an ode for poor Edmund. I am turning out a little sonnet myself, in my own poor way. How about you?"

Whereupon, William Shakespeare, unwilling to offend Drayton and Jonson, two tried old friends—the three had a last drink together in Stratford a few days before Shakespeare's death in 1616—pushed aside the tedious manuscript of *Much Ado About Nothing*, and, taking up a scrap of vellum, dashed off what was, for him, a very poor sonnet . . .

Ah, naturally you ask me how Sweetbread knew that it was a scrap of vellum and a sonnet. Well, Sweetbread did not know. He knew only the bare historical facts. It was I who discovered the details, as I am about to tell you. Briefly, Mr. Three III made it clear that he would pay $2,000,000, and no questions asked, for that original manuscript of William Shakespeare.

"What do you want it for?" I asked.

He said, "To keep. Just to have. For the sake of owning something unique in the world."

Here, if you like, was something of a tall order. I ask you: walk into Westminister Abbey, open one of the famous graves in the Crypt, rummage in it and walk out undetected. Just try it and see.

I said to Mr. Three III, "No doubt, if I were prepared to risk my liberty, you would be prepared to chance a little money in advance?"

Upon this, there was sordid haggling, but in the end—acquainted with my reputation for scrupulous fair dealing—Mr. Three agreed to advance me $50,000, and to put down a certified check payable on or before a date which I will call the twenty-third.

It was on this date that I guaranteed to deliver whatever manuscripts I might find in the tomb of Edmund Spenser—especially the Shakespeare manuscript. Thus, upon a precarious understanding,

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I went to work at one of the trickiest jobs in the history of crime, working on a hunch.

You see, one word having led to another, figure followed number and number chased figure until Three and I found ourselves haggling over dates. There is nothing like a written date to catch such people as Mr. Three. He, having postdated his checks, demanded of me a date of delivery. To which I acceded: the twenty-third of the following month.

Now, exactly why did I pin myself down to this date in particular? Mr. Three III was anxious to know, but I do not mind telling you. Two days before this date, on the twenty-first, workmen were due to enter the Abbey in order to make certain repairs deep down.

Simply, I proposed to join them. And so I did, and thus I carried away, for $2,000,000, an original manuscript of William Shakespeare.

But how?

There was a time, my boy, when I used to attend the annual meetings of the Conjurors Club—myself an amateur—when, on a naked stage, the leading magicians of the country demonstrated to one another their newest tricks.

One evening, at one of these meetings, a group of five Yorkshiremen dressed as Chinamen walked on and off the stage, putting up an open tent. They went, they came; they came and they went. This one carried a pole; that one carried a flag; another dragged a carpet; a fourth shouldered a mallet; the fifth stood still in a mandarin's robe and did nothing.

They came, they went—never leaving that little stage. But all of a sudden the little tent being twitched away, there were only four Chinamen. One . . . two . . . three . . . four—categorically, four.

They bustled about, picking up pegs, rolling up canvas, fetching stage—and then, there were two!

Rolled up in the tent, you guess? Not so. The man carrying the canvas let it unroll and fall with a terrible thud. Still, only two Chinamen left out of five, on a bare stage, with no backdrops, mirrors, or other apparatus. Three men spirited away, ha?

This trick I saw through, and remembered. It was the ancient business of G. K. Chesterton's Invisible Man in operation: let anyone grow accustomed to your comings and your goings, especially if you are carrying something, and you remain unnoticeable.

Here was your principle of the Chinamen in the magicians' trick. One person, the mandarin, stood stock-still. Upon him all eyes were concentrated. His four collaborators came and went, and so, under the keenest eyes in the world, could go without coming again, and still, in the imagination of the audience, remain present.

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Hypnosis of stillness? That is well enough in its place. But for general purposes, give me the hypnosis of coming-and-going. A combination of the two is difficult to resist.

So, I cut my mustache down to a toothbrush, which I dyed red, and applied to my forehead a lock of hair such as is called a "quiff." I dressed myself like a respectable workingman in workingman's clothes, took hold of a plank, and went with the others down into the Crypt of the Abbey; bustled up and hurried down again with crowbars and wedges. When in doubt, keep moving as if with a set purpose. An official looked at me questionly once, but, pulling out of my pocket a cold chisel, I shouted, "All right, all right! I'm coming, Jack!" —and so disappeared as two men passed me with a thing like a hospital stretcher loaded with concrete.

As often as possible I carried bulky objects on my shoulder just in case, in passing, someone chanced to take too keen an interest in my face. One cannot be too careful of broad daylight. Under the artificial lights in the shadowy Crypt, I felt tolerably safe. Yet even of shadows one cannot be too sure.

The foreman of the gang of workmen had spent most of his life working in ancestral vaults on restoration jobs. I had a bad moment when he accosted me and said, "Hoi! Who are you? What have you got there?"

But I am a man who has made a habit of anticipating the unexpected and foreseeing the unforeseen. This, of course, is silly talk; because, if you anticipate something, it must be expected; and if you foresee something, it cannot be unforeseen. Logic! I had, as matter of routine, found out the name of the foreman and the names of his immediate superiors.

"Cement, Mr. Edwards," I said, letting fall the sack. "Mr. Graves sent me. He said you was a man short."

He said, with a kind of weary disgust, "I don't know nothing about that. Oh, well, all right. Got your card and pass, I suppose? well, get cracking, Jumbo, and lend a hand with that mortar. Mix, man, mix! We haven't got all day."

They had not, indeed; there was little time to go before the gang stopped work for the day. But I was annoyed at being recognized as a stranger. My plan originally had been to pass entirely unnoticed; to hide myself in the shadows when the workmen went out; lock myself in the Crypt for the night, taking my bits of paper at my leisure; and so, out, with a ladder on my shoulder when they came back next morning.

But now I had swiftly to change my plan. I had to stay conspicuous under the very eyes of the foreman, and yet remain invisible.

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As usual, I had an inspiration—one of my little flashes of genius. Now any silly sedentary thriller writer may perpetrate or detect from an armchair, but it takes a man of action with nerves of steel to do what I did then. Slipping into the shadows, I stripped myself of shoes, trousers, and shirt, so that I stood in my underclothes. People have sometimes laughed at me for wearing a combination, or a union suit, as it is also called. I tell you, I was glad of that union suit then. I dipped both hands into a bag of cement which I had placed in readiness and whitened myself from head to foot.

Then I lay down on the blank surface of a plain tomb, crossed my arms, and kept still. There was only half an hour to go before the whistle blew, but that half hour saw one of the most trying I have ever spent in my life. My nostrils were full of cement, so that I wanted to sneeze, and I itched abominably. Once I heard the foreman say, "Where's that great big slob got to now? The one Graves sent?"

One of the workman said, "Dunno, gaffer. Thought I see 'im lugging a plank, a little while back."

So he had, but time is a tricky thing when you are on a job and haven't got a watch.

"I'm fed up with the loafers Graves sends me . . . All right, knock off now. Go home and eat your sausages and kippers—that's all you're fit for. Pack up!"

One of the workmen naïvely tried to tell him that his wife made him a nice meat pie for his tea . . . and there I lay straining every muscle to hold back a monumental sneeze. Thank heaven the lights were being switched out, for, as they passed me, two of the workmen stopped to look at me.

One of them said, "Who's he, Jack? Never noticed that image before."

"You wouldn't," said the other, with contempt. "It's some famous poet. Bin dead a thousand years. Where's yer education?"

"It ain't even lifelike," his companion said. "Sort of in'uman, ain't it?"

"Kind of gruesome. But p'raps they looked like that in older times . . . Let's get out of 'ere, they're shutting up."

I do not know whether this was the greatest compliment or the deadliest insult I have ever received. It added to my discomfort, however, because in addition to that maddening urge to sneeze, I had a wild impulse to cry, in a sepulchral voice, "Boo!"—and this impulse gave rise to a desire to laugh.

But they went their ways, and at last I was alone in the Crypt.

The rest was easy, if somewhat ghoulish. The Abbey, as you know, is patrolled by watchmen. Having ascertained the times of their coming and going—they were quite perfunctory in their patrol of the Crypt by night—I could go to

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work at my leisure. And so I did, with crowbar and wedges.

I was glad that the remains of poor Edmund Spenser were incased in lead and that the poets had dropped their offerings on top of the casket. Thus, it was not necessary for me to disturb his dust. In the light of my flash lamp I saw, lying on that leaden surface, some detritus that might once have been paper, but now resembled, let us say, corn flakes. The vellum alone remained, and that only in part. So I took it, and with all reverence sealed the tomb . . .

Oh, but that was a long cold night I spent hiding in the shadows among the graves, trying to fortify myself with a flask of brandy and some sandwiches with which I had furnished myself. But the night passed, and when the workmen came back I was among them in my laborer's clothes, having washed myself in a pail of water that was used to make mortar. There I was carrying a shovel.

The foreman shouted at me, "You lump! You blithering gowk! Where did you get to yesterday evening?"

"I had a stomach-ache."

"Well, take your stomach-ache out of here. Take it to Mr. Graves and tell him I don't want you. I'll pick my own gangs, by the Lord!"

"You mustn't mention the Lord; you're in a church," said one of the men.

In the course of the row that ensued, I carried my shovel out of the Abbey, and so got away with that priceless bit of vellum, for which, true to his word, Mr. Three III paid me $2,000,000; of which I duly handed $250,000 to Sweetbread.

There is the story.

"Well?" said Karmesin. "You will not believe even such a straightforward story as that now, I suppose?"

I said, in mollifying tones, "After all, Karmesin, such a story is hard to credit without, say, a bit of documentary evidence."

He was not perturbed as I had feared he might be. "Eh? What did you say? Documentary evidence? But of course," he said, pulling out of an inside pocket the biggest wallet I have ever seen. "Let me see, now—let me see."

He took out a piece of stiff paper about six inches by four and, offering it to me said, "Here you are. Before I handed over the original, I made a photographic copy of it. Can you read it?"

I could not decipher more than a word or two. I saw, simply, a couple of detached rags of an old manuscript, but I could read the signature—*Wm. Shakespeare.*

"May I have a copy of this?" I asked.

"No, you may not," said Karmesin. "But, if you like, I will rewrite you these lines as Sweetbread transcribed them in modern spelling."

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He took pencil and paper, and here is what I, in my turn, pass on:

. . . nd Spenser
Would that with these poor words I
seal'd my grief
In this cold grave, old friend. Yet
mourn I must
For memory runs more slower than
the thief
That men call Death, and when
these bones are dust
Since grief like noble wine grows
strong and sweet
With Time in shadow, so my
mourning will.
God grant that you sleep deep while
we who wake
And born to be forgot await our
Night.

Wm. Shakspere

"Shakespeare did better," said Karmesin, putting back his wallet. "But remember, at that time he was harassed with show business and the script of *Much Ado About Nothing.*"

"But," I said, "since the existence of these manuscripts in Spenser's tomb was, as you say, known to be a fact, why hasn't the government investigated?"

Karmesin said, "It has. Acting on irrefutable evidence, the grave of Edmund Spenser was officially opened in 1938. Consult your authorities, including Clifford Bax, if you don't believe me. They opened the grave and found—nothing. I had been there first."

"But the manuscript—the manuscript!" I cried.

Karmesin said, "Ah, that. Pity. Mr. Three III married a frugal housewife in 1929—someone after his own heart, more or less. He died not long after. I rather think that a sympathetic collector of unconsidered trifles got hold of the Shakespeare manuscript. I know for a fact that a dealer named Newgate paid an absurd price—ten times collector's value—for a first edition of *Tom Jones,* 'With Miscellaneous Papers, Et cetera,' and, in the spring of 1931, bought a yacht."

"It all seems so incredible," I protested.

"I am tired of your 'incredibles.' Why, only the other day a few Scottish amateurs walked into Westminster Abbey and trotted out with the sacred Stone of Scone, upon which the throne of England stands. Their trick was the same as mine, old as the hills. Child's play! I should not have troubled to mention my little affair, except that I know you to be interested in literary curiosities. Thanks for the lunch. Au revoir."

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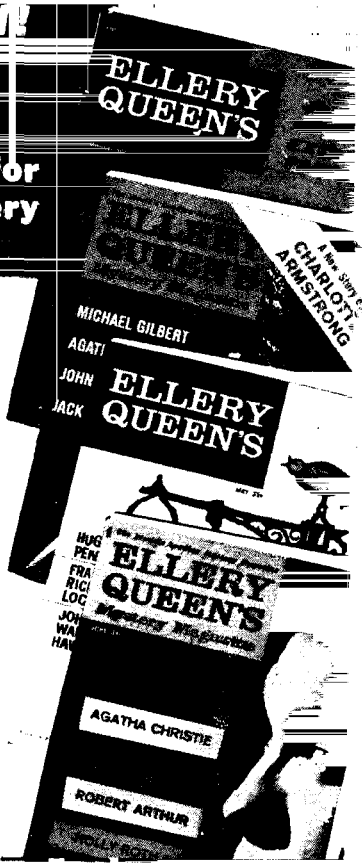

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